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The acclaimed artist lifts the lid on Saga

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ART & ADVICE

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ARE COMIC ARTISTS GETTING A ROUGH RIDE?

NEW ASSASSIN'S CREED SYNDICATE ART REVEALED

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Real paint on a digital canvas.

Welcome. . .
to something different

For some, 'indie comics' is anything that doesn't feature supes flying around in their underpants. That's simplifying things a tad. What links artists like Tim Gibson, Matt Taylor and Michael Dialynas (who all speak out in our feature Does Drawing Comics Pay on page 20) is they're in charge, and not bothered by ambitious accountants. Their titles may be self-published or have minimal distribution, but they're as original, weird and wonderful as their creators (want them to be).

Take our cover star, Tank Girl: Jamie Hewlett and Alan Martin's anarcho-punk, eternally shooting around the post-apocalypse with her mutant kangaroo lover. Not your typical comic female lead, but as cover artist Brett Parson tells us on page 56, that's the whole appeal. She was different when she burst on to the indie scene in the 80s and, tellingly, she still seems different in Brett's 21st Century Tank Girl series today.

For me it's great to finally feature Fiona Staples' art, over on page 42, and cool to see past Batman IFX cover artist Ken Lashley reveal his looser side on page 50. Then there's Jean-Sebastian Monge's caricature Hellboy! I've long loved his fantasy fine art, and when he suggested aiming a stylus at The Red One, it was a no-brainer... And just in case you've had enough comic art, and desperately want to paint a drunk medieval ferret party hard – fear not! The awesome Omar Rayyan will sort you out on page 106!

Beren

Beren Neale, Acting Editor
beren.neale@futurenet.com

Claire Howlett is on maternity leave.

Our special cover for subscribers this issue.

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
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FIONA STAPLES

"My favourite Saga character is Special Agent Gale because he's a sarcastic jerk"
Fiona Staples on her co-created comic hit

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NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX

Resources

Getting hold of all of this issue's videos, artwork and brushes is quick and easy. Just visit our dedicated web page at **http://ifxm.ag/tanks128alot**

OVER 4 HOURS of workshop and Q&A videos to watch and learn from!

WORKSHOP VIDEOS

Paint a girl and her tank

Cartoonist Brett Parson presents his take on the iconic Tank Girl, using SketchBook Pro and Photoshop

RESOURCES

You're three steps away from this issue's resource files...

Go to the website
Type this into your browser's address bar (not the search bar):
http://ifxm.ag/tanks128alot

Find the files you want
Search through the list of resources to watch or download.

Download what you need
You can download all of the files at once, or individually.

EXCLUSIVE VIDEO TUITION!

Watch our videos to gain a unique insight into how our artists create their stunning art

WORKSHOP VIDEOS

Jean-Baptiste Monge

Learn how to take a minimal approach to Photoshop and recreate a comic classic.
Plus WIPs, brushes and final image

256 CUSTOM BRUSHES

Bastien Lecouffe Dehame's 247 brush collection

This is made up of Bastien's own brushes and some free ones from other artists.
www.deharme.deviantart.com

PLUS! 9 workshop brushes
Try out the Photoshop brushes created by Brett Parsons, Nimit Malavia and Anna Steinbauer for this issue's workshops.

Q&A VIDEOS

Charlotte Creber

Understand how different specular effects work in Photoshop to draw magical effects.
Plus WIPs and final image

TRAINING

James Gurney

The painter and illustrator shares his skills for creating brilliant paintings on location, in Gouache In The Wild.

WIPs and finished art available to download, created by pro artists including Nimit Malavia, Omar Rayyan, Brynn Metheney and others.

ImagineFX **ARTIST** of the **MONTH**

🇺🇸 Kirbi Fagan

LOCATION: US
WEB: www.kirbiillustrations.com
EMAIL: kirbi.illustrations@gmail.com
MEDIA: Photoshop

Since graduating art school, Kirbi has focused on producing Young Adult book covers. "Many people describe my work as nostalgic or dreamlike," she reveals. "By combining textures and art styles of old and new I hope to create a timeless aesthetic."

Her inspirations are constantly evolving but she's always admired 1960s lifestyle illustrators like Eric Earnshaw, Jack Potter and Coby Whitmore for their bold colours and shapes. "I insist on creating my own textures that I scan and integrate into my paintings, which means each piece has time on a real easel. Even though my work is stylised, it's informed by reality. Building small dioramas and photographing models for reference are critical parts of my process."

1 **FIVE WANDS** "A tarot card based on Alice in Wonderland's queen's croquet game. The stylised, ribbon-like hair in this image was inspired by the art of JC Leyendecker."

2 **FAIRY TALE** "This book takes place in a fairy world meets New York City. I'm currently working on the third book for this series by Shanna Swendson, which features the bulldog again who I adore painting!"

Artist at it

Jon Schindehette, founder of The ArtOrder, likes Kirbi's style

"Kirbi uses visual symbols, textures and minimal colour palettes to create visually rich and interesting images. The mixture of rendered and unrendered spaces adds a fresh feel and helps focus the eye."

Priscilla Kim

LOCATION: US
WEB: www.priscilla-kim.com
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MEDIA: Photoshop

Priscilla grew up immersed in fantasy and science fiction, rarely seeing the sun and mostly playing in worlds of the imagination. She started drawing properly around the age of 12, when she discovered role-playing and felt the urgent need to visualise her characters.

Almost 20 years later, not much has changed, though she rarely plays these days. "I prefer depicting characters doing things or looking cool. But the most relaxing thing for me to do is to paint female portraits – a tendency I jokingly call my 'pretty women staring off into space' theme!"

IMAGINEFX CRIT

Cliff Hope,
Operations Editor

1 THE AVIATRIX "Done for SmART School with Dan Dos Santos, the prompt being 'the girl/boy with the golden wings.' I chose to do something that I hadn't tried before and went a little dieselpunk."

2 NOW CRACKS A NOBLE HEART 'A rerendering of an old, old sketch of old, old characters dating from middle school. I kept coming back to it over the years, but my skills weren't up to par to finish it until more recently."

3 THROUGH A BLADE DARKLY "Yet another SmART School piece, this one under the tutelage of Donato Giancola; the only guideline was 'reflection.' I ended up doing a new rendition of an old role-playing character in a couple of her incarnations. No, it's not Legend of the Five Rings."

4 IN THE DARKNESS BIND HIM "Done for SmART School under Dan Dos Santos; the prompt was 'the friendship between a girl and a vampire.' I didn't do friendship so much!"

🇺🇸 **Reiko Murakami**
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.reikomurakami.com
EMAIL: raqmoful@gmail.com
MEDIA: Photoshop

Reiko is a concept artist and illustrator based in Boston. Originally born in Japan, it has been 18 years since she moved to the US. "I've always been interested in drawing people and animals even when I was a kid," she says.

Her love of drawing led her to enter the Rhode Island School of Design, and eventually to become a concept artist and character designer for video games. "For my personal work I focus on depicting female figures as surreal metaphors for emotions. Music and stories help me become inspired, but I almost always find a subject to paint deep inside my heart."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

Beren Neale,
Acting Editor

1 LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR "This was my unofficial contribution to Kristina Carroll's Month of Love project. I also worked on it during Scott Fischer's class. The dynamic movement in this scene came from his art direction."

2 JUNE "I did this because I realised that I almost never painted a character looking directly at the camera. I still covered her eyes with her hair and textures, but this is a statement and a turning point in the series; I've conquered my trauma and acknowledge my strengths."

Cai's formal education in architecture eventually developed into a career in art and illustration, as his interest for creating imaginative worlds grew.

"I'm inspired by great stories, both epic narratives of heroes and monsters, and tales from my father of life as a young boy," he says. "I'm always searching for the adventure in the mundane, spinning it into a visual narrative that might take the viewer through a journey of the mind's eye."

Cai reveals that he loves telling stories through the stroke of his brush, and is looking forward to where this passion will take him.

1 PORTRAIT STUDY "I wanted to focus on a tight painting, experimenting with different brushes, digital painting techniques and edges. I also wanted to see how well I could portray mood and atmosphere, with that particular lighting setup and all the subtle colour changes in the flesh tones that came with it."

2 HOPE WALKS "This image was produced as part of a personal project creating visual adaptations of certain scenes in The Night Angel Trilogy series of novels by Brent Weeks. It's one of my favourite books."

3 ALMOST THERE "Painted during the long hiatus between seasons two and three of Nickelodeon's TMNT animated show. I wanted this image to tell a story about the brotherly relationship between the turtles during this trying period of their adventures."

Wendy Martin
LOCATION: US
WEB: wendymartinillustration.com
EMAIL: art@wendymartinillustration.com
MEDIA: Illustrator, Photoshop

Wendy received no formal art training, but instead learnt from books, friends and mentors. Her art education was in fashion and graphic design, but in 2005 she decided to pursue illustration full-time and has never looked back.

"I think my work can be boiled down to these three words: myth, magic and Mucha. I call my art mixed-media, since I switch back and forth between traditional and digital mediums, needing both to complete a painting."
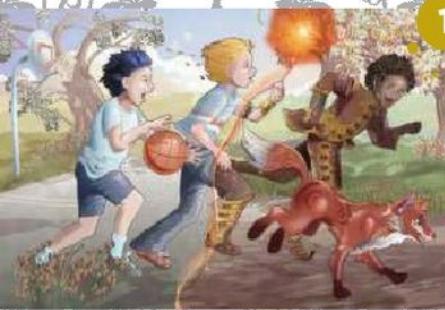
1 BASKETBALL COURT PORTAL "This is one of my children's book art illustrations. I wanted to show the mundane world on one side with a magical counterpart on the other."

2 THE ROSE SISTERS "Drawn for a charity anthology for RAIIN. The story is a post-apocalyptic retelling of one of my all-time classic faerie tales, East of the Moon, West of the Sun.

3 ACE OF WANDS "This is a companion piece to one I created at IMC 2012. The prompt I followed was the tale of Tristan and Isolde. One of the instructors suggested I do an entire tarot deck after seeing my first piece. Here, Isolde discovers Tristan on the beach after he's mortally wounded."
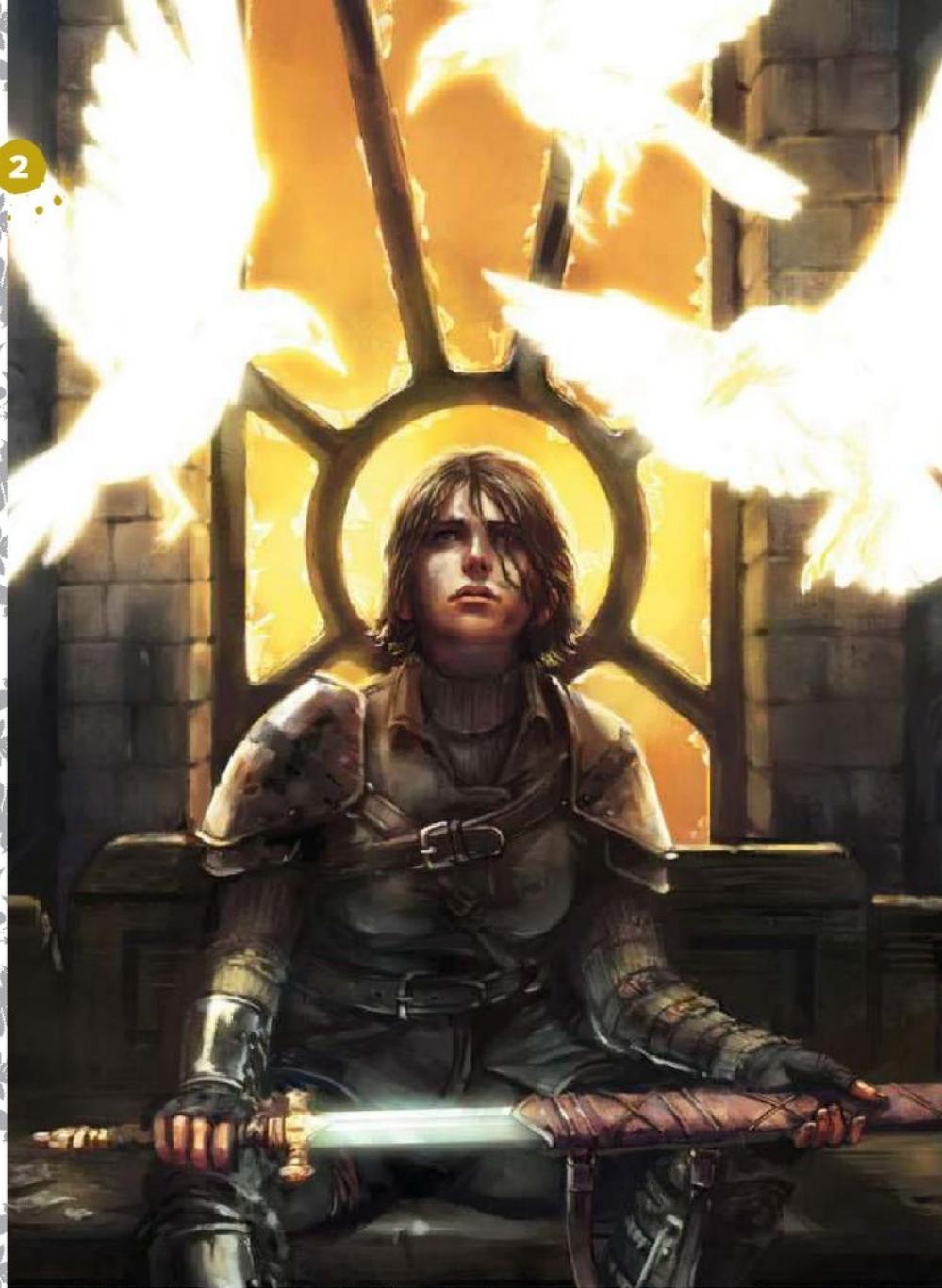
Kim Sokol

LOCATION: Canada
WEB: kimsokol.com
EMAIL: kim@kimsokol.com
MEDIA: Photoshop

Freelance illustrator Kim graduated her Illustration degree from Sheridan College with a portfolio full of linear, editorial illustration, but quickly realised she would rather do realistic work featuring elves. Based out of Kingston, Ontario, the artist works mostly in the gaming industry for clients such as Paizo, AEG, and Fantasy Flight.

"I love luminous, glowing lighting," says Kim, "and painting narrative images that make people want to question the scene and fill in the blanks with their own story."

1 SPECIAL DELIVERY "This was painted for Illustration Master Class 2014, with the theme being 'dragon rider'. I wanted to show a dragon being used as a courier of some sort, which of course leads to the question: what kind of city would need flying mail delivery the most?"

2 PALADIN "A paladin after an apocalypse. This was a two-year-old painting based on a four-year-old painting, recently revised because other people seemed to like it and so did I."

3 HEALING LIGHT "A job fell through after I'd already shot it, and I loved the photo's lighting so much that I built a new piece around it. This piece won a Juror's Choice award at Gen Con 2015."

SUBMIT YOUR ART TO FXPosé

Send up to five pieces of your work, along with their titles, an explanation of your techniques, a photo of yourself and contact details. Images should be sent as 300DPI JPEG files.

Email: fxpose@imaginefx.com (maximum 1MB per image)

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All artwork is submitted on the basis of a non-exclusive worldwide licence to publish, both in print and electronically.

Does drawing comics pay?

Artists speak Garrick Webster asks indie comic artists about the industry and whether they're able to earn a decent crust…

With the buzz that surrounds superhero movies continuing unabated, it seems on the surface that there's never been a better time to draw comics.

Let's crunch some numbers. Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy brought in nearly $1.2 billion for Warner Brothers, owner of DC Comics. The 2012 Avengers film earned $623 million and in May 2015 Avengers: Age of Ultron came out with a tale of $191 million in its first week.

But how much do the films actually help comic sales? According to US sales figures, in the month Age of Ultron came out, the comic Uncanny Avengers Ultron Forever 1 took $201,331, while Uncanny Avengers 4 made $186,736 in sales. The industry was boosted with the launch of Secret Wars, which sold over 500,000 copies in its first week and sales of the top 300 books were

Variant artwork by Dennis Calero for Marvel's X-Men Noir series.

Illustrator Matt Taylor has been drawing Wolf, a fantasy/crime noir comic series published by Image.
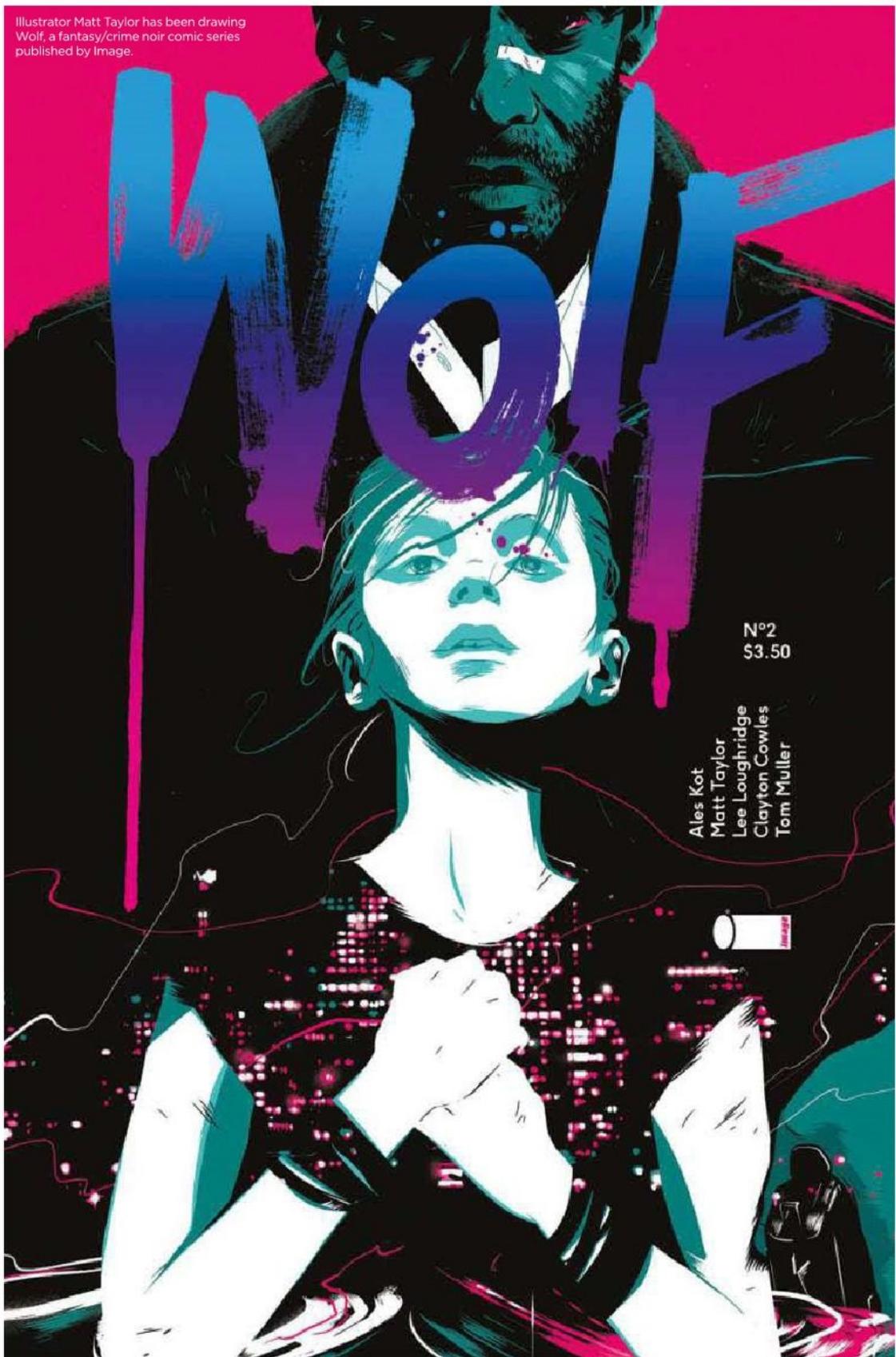
Wolf

Nº2
$3.50

Ales Kot
Matt Taylor
Lee Loughridge
Clayton Cowles
Tom Muller

In The Woods, drawn by Michael Dialynas, an entire school is ripped from reality and transplanted in some woods, on another planet.

up 20 per cent compared to May 2014. But still, these numbers are dwarfed by the film revenues.

What about the artists – are they seeing much trickledown of funds from these huge films? Not really. A survey on the site SKTCHD.com in mid-June showed that nearly half of comic artists who responded were earning less than $12,000 a year from comics, and that 28 per cent are on less than $100 per page. That's borderline poverty.

"I'm new to the industry, but it does feel like there's a lot of work for not a huge return in comics," says Matt Taylor, who draws Wolf, published by Image. "A common recurring phrase I've heard is that you do it 'for the love of comics'. Which may be true, but at the end of the day you still have to put food on the table."

THE DREAM OF ROYALTIES

Like many other artists, England-based Matt takes commissions outside of comics to bolster his income. One half-page illustration for The New Yorker pays as well as 24 comic pages. Because Wolf is published by Image, which allows artists and writers to own their work, Taylor will earn royalties from the
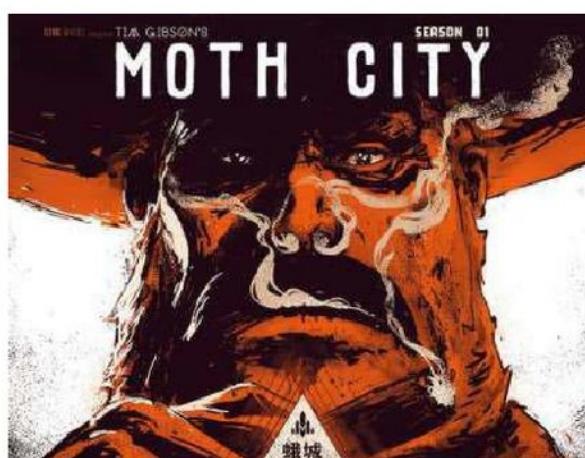
Tim Gibson's web comic Moth City is set during the Chinese civil war during the 1930s.

book, and if it's snapped up by a film company then he might make a fortune from it... one day.

The creator-owned indie model seems to be emerging as a favourite among artists – witness the success of Saga, drawn by Fiona Staples for instance (see page 42). The downside is that you can end up waiting three or four months for your royalties to come through.

Like Matt, New Zealander Tim Gibson became a comic artist out of sheer love for the genre. He was a 3D and concept artist at Weta, then became a freelance illustrator, but

❝ You do it for 'the love of comics', but you still have to put food on the table ❞

INDUSTRY INSIGHT
MICHAEL DIALYNAS

Based in Greece, Michael draws The Woods for Boom! Studios

So what's it like to be working for Boom?
They are very laid-back and easy-going. The Woods is a project that will run for 36 issues so that's nine trade paperbacks. I have a page rate and partnership cut of whatever is made. They have a pretty good deal.

What's your view on the way the comic industry works?
The industry is at a high right now with creator-owned books booming compared to a few years back. But it's a weird place for artists compared to the 90s, when we had major selling power and people would say, "Have you seen the new issue of X-Men? Jim Lee's art is fricking awesome!" Then buy 10 copies and put them in a safe.

What's changed?
Things have shifted to the other extreme, where writers are held as the sole creators of comics and the artists are interchangeable. It's odd when you think that we work in a visual medium and most artists work all day pencilling and inking one page.

What would you change?
Artists should have higher page-rates, even if it's an advance of royalties. Because of the time it takes to make each panel communicate to the reader, design the characters, build the world the story takes place in and act out every emotion on the page. Comic artists have the role of a whole film crew and should be treated as such.

What have you got coming up?
In December I'll have my childhood dream come true when the first issue of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles I'm drawing comes out from IDW. I'm psyched!

Michael was laid off during the financial crisis in Greece, so pitched an idea to Dark Horse, and became a comic artist.

www.madart84.blogspot.co.uk

Wolf features Antoine Wolfe, a paranormal hardboiled detective.
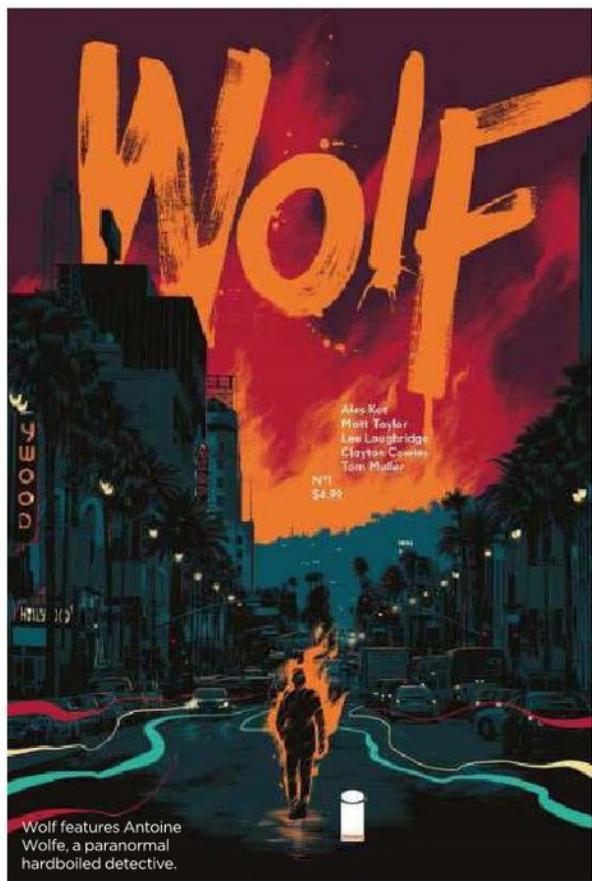
➤➤ always wanted to do comics. A grant in his home country enabled him to take a year off to produce Moth City. Luckily for Tim, it was snapped up by the subscription-based web comic publisher Thrillbent, and by comiXology.

THE WEB COMIC ROUTE

As a publisher of a web comic, you have total control of your creation, but you also take all the risk of getting it out there, and making it happen takes a huge effort.

"You might control your own destiny a bit more than an artist waiting to be commissioned or assigned to a comic," says Tim. "But you also can't succeed without all the associated tasks of running a web-business: regular blogging, site management, social media outreach and store management."

He adds: "There's no guarantee that you'll ever see any money from them, and building a site and audience that will allow eventual income is a dark art of its own."

A page from Matt Taylor's self-published graphic novel, The Great Salt Lake.

And like Matt, Tim finds that a comic page earns him between 10 and 20 per cent of what he would normally receive from an illustration commission.

Dennis Calero is an artist who's seen comics go from page to screen. He helped Platinum Studios to present its property Cowboys & Aliens to the film companies, and saw the fallout when the management and creators wrangled over the royalties. Today he writes and

> ❝ A writer is paid roughly the same amount as the artist, even though the drawing takes a lot longer ❞

draws The Suit, which he owns and which appears in Dark Horse Presents.

"Publishers are reaching out to foreign markets in order to save a buck," Dennis says. "Now, there are some incredible European, South American and Asian artists who are kicking a lot of ass. But there are a plethora of mediocre illustrators who just aren't cutting the mustard and are clearly only getting work because they're charging 30 cents on the dollar."

Artists today feel undervalued compared to writers. A writer on a comic is paid roughly the same amount as the artist, even though drawing it takes a lot longer than

LATER...

BANG!

BANG!

— HIC —

MCCAW...

BANG!

BRROONG!

WE'RE HERE TO COLLECT OUR ORDER, GOVERNOR. BUT FROM WHERE I'M STANDING IT LOOKS LIKE YOU MIGHT BE BUSY WITH YOUR WORKERS.

Moth City by Tim Gibson. "It has bio-weapons, the Chinese Nationalist army, communism and a cowboy," he says.

Tim Gibson took a year out of his usual freelancing to create Moth City, the online comic.

Above and left: Paul Dialynas used shifts in colour palettes to help pace the storytelling in The Woods from Boom! Studios.

Below: Dennis Calero drew four chapters of the free online comic Devil Inside, written by actor Todd Stashwick.
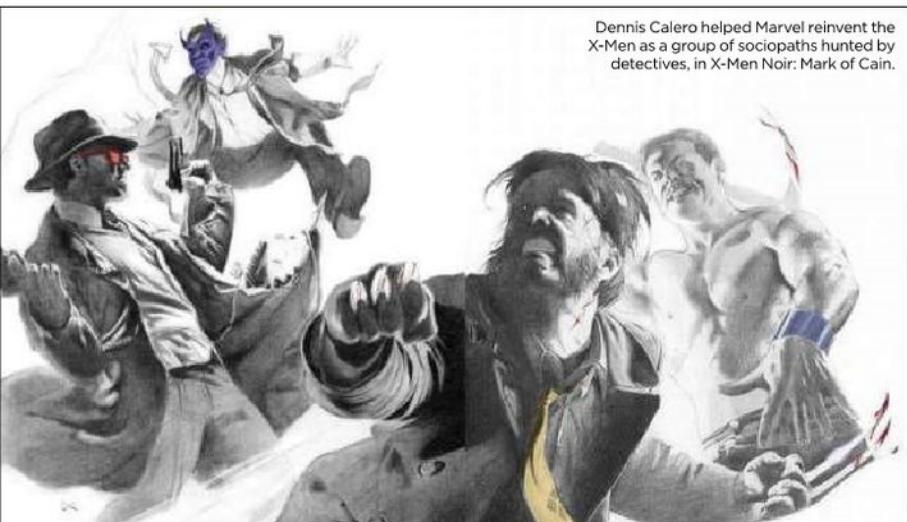
Dennis Calero helped Marvel reinvent the X-Men as a group of sociopaths hunted by detectives, in X-Men Noir: Mark of Cain.
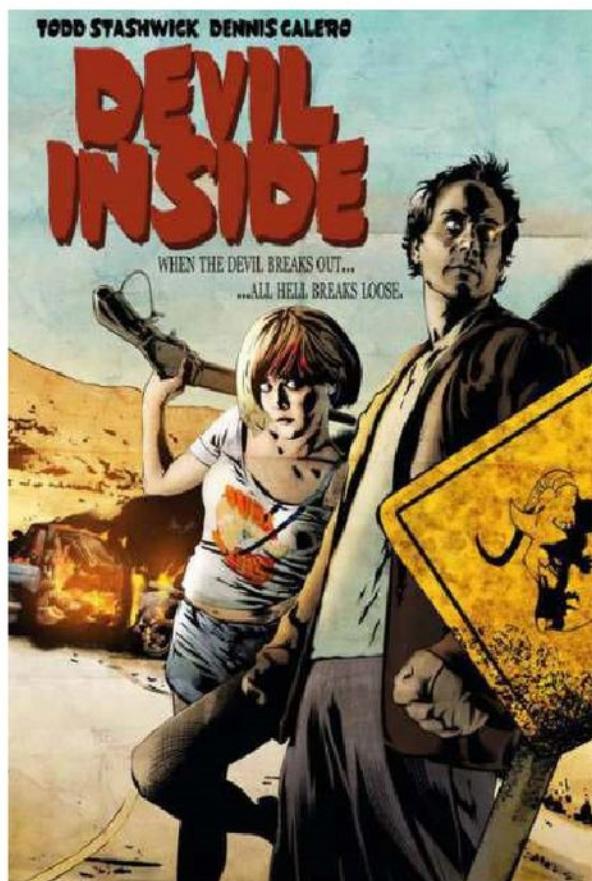
writing it. A writer can appear in five or six titles a month; an artist only features in one, or maybe two if they're working all hours. Yet the writer may walk away with many times what the artist has earned.

Disney has owned Marvel Comics for the past five years, and some fear comic artists could soon be like animators: faceless workstation fodder, toiling away, low paid and unknown to the audience.

HUMAN RESOURCES

"I hope eventually the idea that characters are all that matter in this genre will fall by the wayside and publishers will realise it's the people that make these funny books that count and who are the backbone of any creative company. A resource to be grown and nurtured, not exploited," says Dennis."

With all the reboots we've seen from Marvel and DC, and with indie comics thriving one minute and diving the next, it's hard to tell whether comic industry bosses really know what's going on. Online and print publishing models continue to shift. Yet huge amounts of money are coming in from superhero films at the moment. Hopefully more of it will be wisely invested – in the comic artists who give life to the superheroes in the first place.

Andrew Wildman is perhaps best known for his work on Transformers. His self-penned series, HORIZON, will be on show at Thought Bubble.

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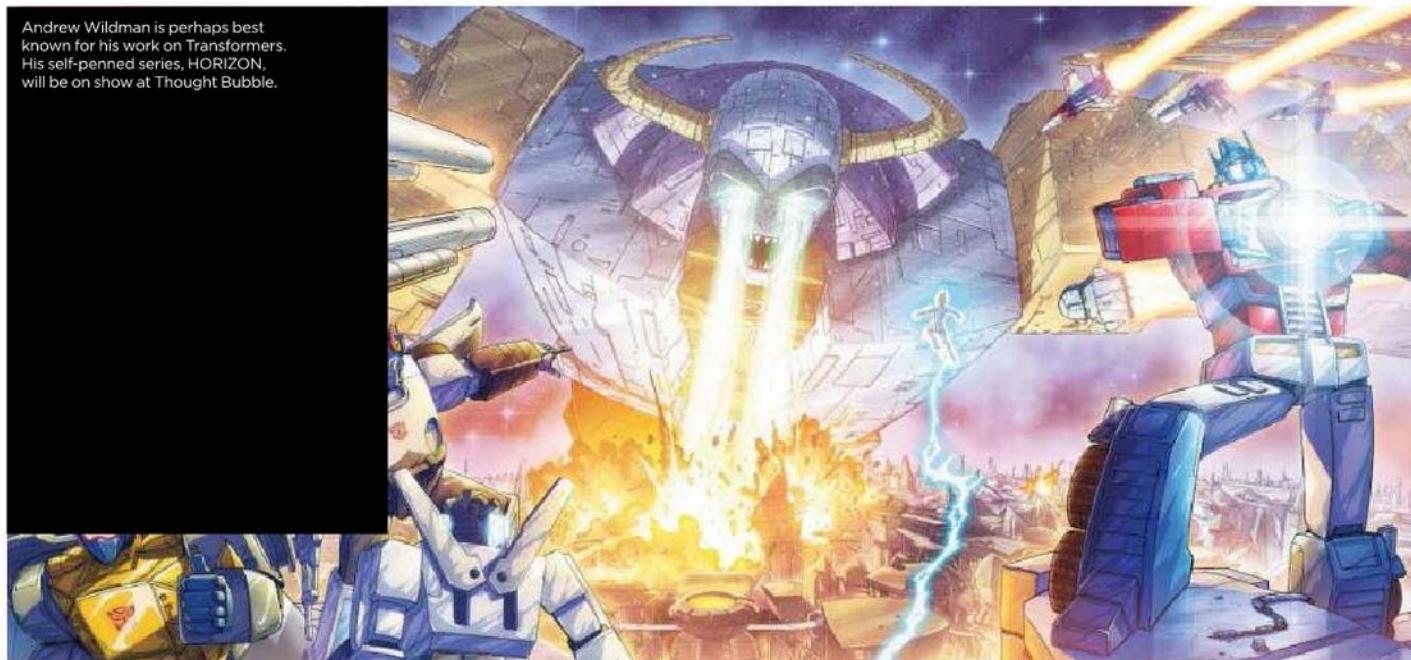
Bubbling over with comic inspiration

Pause for thought Comic art-driven convention Thought Bubble is now in its ninth year. We see how it's grown in size and ambition

Thought Bubble was established in 2007 as a one-day UK event – a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting comics, graphic novels and animation. Its humble beginnings are long behind it, because the convention is now a week-long tribute to the medium.

"We try to make each Thought Bubble bigger and better than the last, and we're constantly striving to bring comics to a wider audience," says assistant director Clark Burscough. He says that every year the event attracts more amazing creators that even the team weren't aware of. "It's rewarding seeing so many new faces, and we get to meet people from all over the world," he reveals. "It's

The Wicked + The Divine creators Kate Brown and Kieron Gillen will both be at Thought Bubble.

Clark says he wants people to be able to come to the show and discover their new favourite creator or comic.

Photograph by Michael Bracewell

a great way of keeping abreast of the developments within the medium."

This year Clark's particularly excited to welcome Joan Cornellà to the festival, whose dark, humourous cartoons you may have seen shared on Facebook; and Montreal-based publisher Drawn and Quarterly. "We're also really excited to be welcoming Rick Remender to Thought Bubble this year. His Deadly Class and Black Science series are two of the best monthly comics on the stands at the moment, and are well worth picking up the collections if you haven't read them already," says Clark.

As well as many major comic creators to meet and greet, and some talented indie folks, Thought Bubble is home to the British Comic Awards, founded by Adam Cadwell. "We're always thinking of new ways to keep the Thought Bubble vibe going all year round," Clark says. And if you can't make the UK's biggest comic event, you can still pick up a little of their bubbly vibe: "Every year we publish a charity anthology, which is distributed worldwide thanks to Image Comics." This year's anthology will be on sale 4 November in all good comic shops.

Thought Bubble is on from 9 to 15 November in Leeds, England, and you can find out more about the convention and buy tickets at **www.thoughtbubblefestival.com.**

Fiona Stephenson's pin-up art appeared on the first issue of Vertigo's Bodies.

Declan Shalvey is a guest at this year's Thought Bubble. This image is taken from his INJECTION series, written by Warren Ellis.

Chris Weston's artwork for Six-Gun Gorilla. The illustrator has made the leap from comics to film concept art and storyboards, and will be attending Though Bubble this year.

66 It's rewarding seeing so many new faces, and we get to meet people from all over the world 99

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ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

News · Bibliothek.

This is Strider from Sideshow Collectibles' LOTR collection. I justified the purchase by telling myself it's an art reference. But it just sits there looking pretty.

I bought this for a facial anatomy class – it's a really useful reference. In the class, we added clay to flesh out the face, but I've never managed to get it all off.

These are a few figurines that I've had forever and a quick Google search tells me they are World of Krystonia figures. I have a variety of sculptures and statuettes that I've collected because I just like the look or shape of them.

I just happened across this crystal ball, and thought it would make a fun addition to my work area. I like to put candles behind it and see how the light interacts with it.

Julie Dillon

Upstairs downstairs The Hugo Award-winning artist reveals how she works on both floors of her home… when her cat allows her to

My work desk is my home-within-my-home, the place where I spend most of my day, and as such I try to make it as comfortable as I can. I've shuffled around the furniture and art elements over the years, slowly adjusting them until I get it just right, and I like how it's set up currently.

I do all my art in Photoshop with an Intuos4 tablet and a dual monitor setup on

a PC. For me, making a work area is primarily about atmosphere, mood and comfort. I try to make sure I'm setting up a place where I can get in a creative mood and focus on my work for several hours a day, without getting burned out or irritated. The room is usually kept relatively dark to avoid glare on the screen, and I have a lot of soft lighting to create a nice mood.

I work at this upstairs desk for most of the day and then in the evening I tend to go

downstairs to watch TV while continuing my work on my laptop.

It's nice to have a change of scenery in the evening, and there are some tasks that I'll save for when I'm on my laptop (anything that doesn't require extra concentration or careful colour calibration).

I feel I should disclose that I'm generally not allowed to keep anything on the top of the bookshelf. If I happen to stay up late working, my cat jumps up on that top shelf

A print by Ciruelo Cabral I got at SDCC. I thought it was particularly lovely. A lot of his work is more detailed, but I like the looser brushstrokes here.

I have a lot of bookshelves, but this one has some of my favourite books. They're like old friends, and it's nice having them around and near at hand.

I really enjoy the perfume oils from Black Phoenix Alchemy Lab, and I like to have a few of my favourites nearby to wear while I'm working (the rest of my massive collection is in my room in a drawer).

I used to play piano a lot, but gave it up to pursue quieter creative outlets. Recently I got an electric keyboard and I can play again, with headphones.
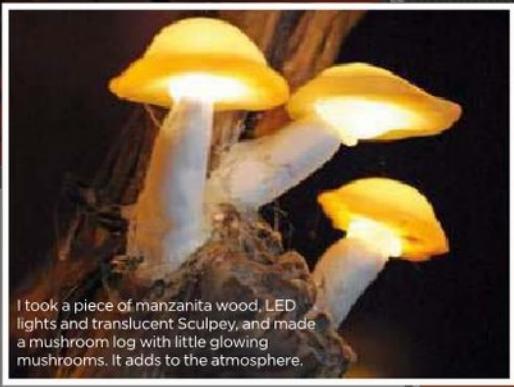
I took a piece of manzanita wood, LED lights and translucent Sculpey, and made a mushroom log with little glowing mushrooms. It adds to the atmosphere.

and angrily shoves off everything in sight, until I get the hint and shut the computer down. He's broken coffee mugs and has made a general mess on many occasions. It's so nice that he cares so much about me getting enough sleep.

Julie is a freelance artist from northern California, whose clients include Wizards of the Coast, Popular Science magazine, Simon & Schuster, Penguin Books, and Tor Books. Her artwork can be seen at www.juliedillonart.com.

This dragon is a sculpture from PurplecatCreatives on Etsy. I really like her style.

This was gorgeously sculpted by Andrew Cawrse. It's been very handy, but I just realised I've been lazy and haven't practised from it as much as I meant to.

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Hatboy
by Vaughn Pinpin

GRAAHH!! YOU WATCHING HORROR MOVIES AGAIN?

WORSE

I'M LOOKING AT SOME OF MY OLD ART!

WOAH! WHAT IS THAT? IS THAT A PERSON?

DON'T JUDGE ME!

OOF!

Giving Harry Potter a brand new look

Making magic Fantasy artist Jim Kay has been tasked with illustrating one of the biggest series in literature

This month sees the release of the first illustrated Harry Potter book, with Bloomsbury aiming to publish the sequels annually over the next six years. The Philosopher's Stone will be available from 6 October, and will feature illustrations by renowned artist Jim Kay.

Working day and night, stopping only to "sleep and walk the dog", Jim is set to produce 110 colour pictures for JK Rowling's blockbuster fantasy series. To create his artwork Jim primarily uses watercolours and pencils, but also incorporates oils and acrylics. "I'm not a purist about materials," he says. "I like using damaged brushes rather than brand new ones – they create interesting marks."

One of the biggest challenges for Jim has been dealing with the expectations from fans. To help him serve both the story and the readers, he's referenced descriptions found in other Harry Potter books, including titles outside of the main series, like Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them.

Jim reveals that he based this illustration of Harry's close friend Hermione on his niece.

Having signed up to illustrate all seven books, Jim is considering a break after The Prisoner Of Azkaban, to complete his own projects (see his art at **www.jimkay.co.uk**). "But I could do this all day, every day," he says. "It's the job of a lifetime."

You can order Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone Illustrated Edition from Bloomsbury: **http://ifxm.ag/hpbloomsbury**.

By painting Draco Malfoy symmetrically, Jim added a little creepiness to the character.

Giant gamekeeper Hagrid was one of Jim's favourite characters to draw.

Letters
YOUR FEEDBACK & OPINIONS

Contact Acting Editor, Beren Neale, on beren@imaginefx.com or write to ImagineFX, Future Plc, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA, UK

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Free game book?

Just a quick note – I have been eagerly awaiting an email for the link that will enable me to download your advertised Game Art ebook [from the Game Art issue 127]. Unfortunately, after many attempts, I've got no emails. Am I doing something wrong?
Graeme Jackson, via email

Beren replies There are a couple steps to take, Graeme. First, go to www.creativebloq.com/game-art, then fill your email and country and click the Submit button. Then check your inbox, confirm you're human, and then you'll receive another email with the link to download the mega game art ebook. BOOM!

The Game Art ebook we gave away in issue 127 is packed with 18 workshops from professional artists.

Back to basics

I've been a game artist for a mobile gaming company for the past two years. I was lucky to get the job based on its need for a flash artist, which I am.

It started off well, but I was more of a tech artist than an artist and I've been improving my art as I work. However, I don't think the company believes I'm improving fast enough, so I may be out of work soon.

Which leaves me wondering if I should go back into full-time education. I'm 33 years old so have been working for about 10 years. I have saved enough to support myself and do a course in art foundations, which I feel I missed out on. I did a degree in animation, but it was awful. With so many short courses online these days, would it be better to create myself a more bespoke learning experience that way?

Also, is there an online directory for all of ImagineFX's published articles?
Rick, via email

Beren replies First off, I hope you aren't laid off Rick – that would suck. I'm also interested in why the animation course was such a stinker? But if you're seriously thinking of getting back into art, the

We weighed up the pros and cons of studying art either online or in a bricks-and-mortar setting in issue 110.

fundamentals are a pretty damn good place to start. I've just come back from a week at the art festival Trojan Horse was a Unicorn, in which I heard digital art luminaries Craig Mullins, Robh Ruppel and, well, just about everyone I spoke to, stress the importance of mastering the fundamentals of drawing.

Craig personally said that going to an actual school was important for him, as it instilled these basics into his art brain. But if you have the drive, I'm sure you can make the most of online classes.

As for our online presence, you will find a good selection of ImagineFX articles over at www.creativebloq.com. It's not all our stuff, but has plenty of workshops and shorter tips from the best artists around. Good luck!

Age ain't nothing but a number

Let me take a moment to thank you and the team at ImagineFX for such a wonderful magazine. I look forward to reading it every month, and always learn something new. It inspires me to continue my studies and improve my skills.

Which leads to my question: is there such a thing as "too old" to break into the illustration business? I'm 48 years old and contemplating a change of career back to my first love of art. I wonder how difficult it will be at my age to get established in the field, though. I'd like to think the quality of the art would be more important than my age, but I'm curious what your opinion is. Any insights would be appreciated.

Thanks very much!
Maalus Malefecti, via email

Beren replies Wow! It must be the positioning of the stars and moon – people are itching for a change into the art world! My first impulse is to say, "Hell no!" Age shouldn't be the basis of an art director saying yea or nay to employing you. That's the principle. The reality is a little more murky. Truth is, it depends. It depends on where your skills were at before you originally changed career. It depends if you have an absolute burning passion to do art, going back to sharpening your drawing skills if need be, studying all hours of the day and night. Ultimately, it depends on the standard of your art right now. Speaking of which, send it in – I'd love to see it!

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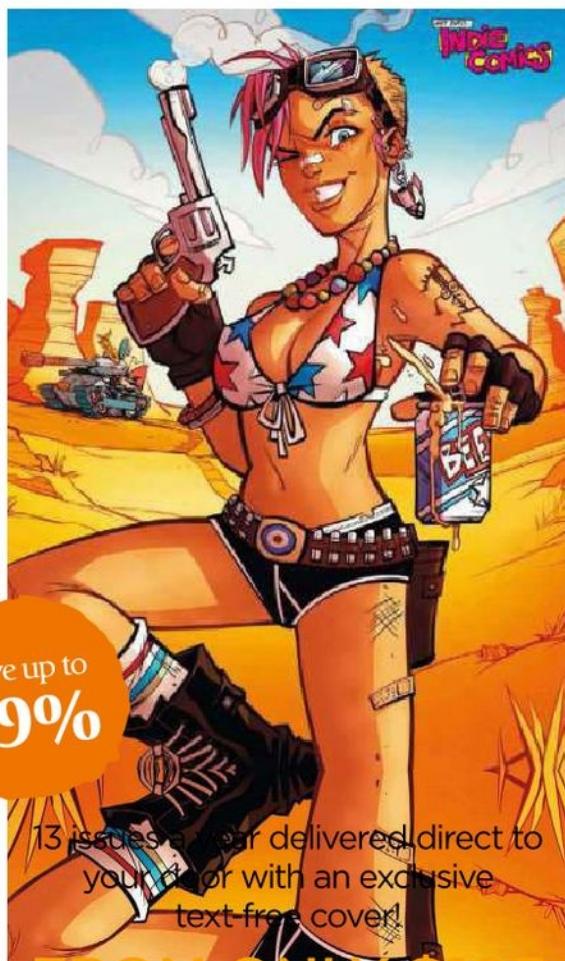
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Artist Q&A

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RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Artist Q&A
Need our advice?
Email **help@imaginefx.com** with your art questions and we'll provide all the answers!

Question

Can you help me concept some ideas for a futuristic firefighter, while maintaining a sense of realism?
Blake Maloney, Canada

Answer
Houston replies

The way fires cause damage to lives and structures has remained the same, and always will. Therefore, a firefighter of the future will have essentially the same needs and tasks that a present-day firefighter has. The main difference is that technology can improve upon things that are cumbersome or not as efficient as they are in the present day – and this is where your role as a concept artist begins.

Start the design process by asking yourself a simple question: what do firefighters need? They need tools to put out flames and destroy barriers or entrapments. They need equipment that ensures their own safety: protective heat-resistant clothing, an oxygen supply, lights and alarms that activate if the wearer stops breathing, for example.

After that, try and figure out how those needs could be improved by technology (even if the technology doesn't exist yet – you'll have to use your imagination and some artistic licence here!). Perhaps to solve the problem of having to wear a heavy, limited-supply oxygen canister, advances in technology have enabled the creation of a lightweight mask that converts the carbon dioxide in the burning environment into an infinite oxygen supply for the wearer to breath. Maybe this mask also features a virtual heads-up display that monitors the wearer's own breathing pattern and provides environmental assessments in real time.

Having these questions in mind will give you a solid groundwork to begin coming up with your future firefighter.

Characters on a white background can have their charm, but nothing sells a design better than when it exists in a setting.
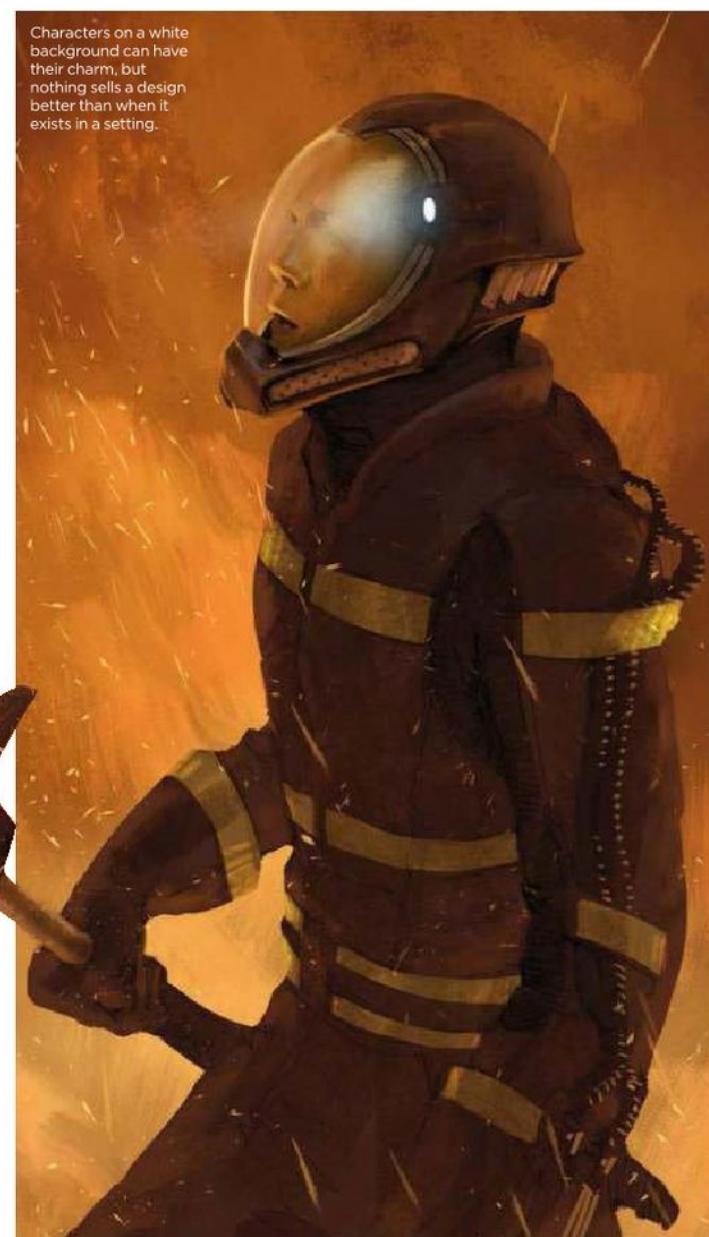
Step-by-step:
Equip a firefighter from the future

1 I begin by working on the overall design and the graphic read of the silhouette. I imagine a protective suit that's less bulky than typical firefighter garb, and a helmet/mask/rebreather hybrid. I kept the reflective rectangular strips to make the new silhouette recognisable as a firefighter's uniform.

2 After establishing a strong, simple graphic silhouette, I can explore other angles and dive into details. This three-quarters view enables me to explore details, such as the exhaust vents on the helmet, and the tubes going from the arm-mounted vapour gun to the small water supply on the wearer's back.

3 Once the design is looking good from multiple angles, I test out different colour variations, taking care not to lose the strong graphic shapes that were established in values during step one. Here, I try recognisable firefighter colours, but it's a good idea to also explore unusual colour schemes, too.

Question
What advice do you have for drawing an animal-human hybrid?
Joel Tse, Australia

I worked with the obvious of a fox, such as the pointed ears and black-brown of its legs. Having references at hand is essential.

For fine details, I use a regular airbrush in Photoshop. Omitting line art also gives a softer feel, which is useful for elements such as fur.

Answer
Jia-Ying replies

When fusing one component with another, I always consider the prominent features of either one. Animal-human hybrids can be particularly fun to plan, because the possibilities are endless and there's no right or wrong.

Before I go into designing such a character, the research comes first. I look up photos of that animal, decide on what characteristics to adopt into the design, and I also ask myself if there are any interesting details I can add to make this character more showy. For instance, the red markings on this fox-human hybrid are comparable to those found on some Japanese fox masks. The important thing, however, is that it should be obvious which animal I'm drawing the inspiration or taking the qualities from.

In this case, the ears and tail should already show what sort of half-creature he is, but I also wanted to embody a bit of playfulness that's sometimes associated with the fox. The posing of the character is also essential in giving us some background to both their personality and animal trait. A snake-human hybrid, for example, would likely be posed in a curvy, provocative manner, because as humans we often perceive the snake as being the cunning, bewitching type (due to its appearance in literature over the years, no doubt).

One thing I note to myself is not to overdo the fur, if any. I want a clean, simple style overall – just a hint of some individual strands and tufts of fur will be enough to convey a fluffy, foxy look.

Question
Can you help me quickly paint an environment?
Daniel Bacchus, South Africa

Answer
Charlotte replies

There are a lot of tools out there that can help make even the most complex environment design manageable, from thumbnail to final product. 3D programs (here I'll be using SketchUp) can streamline the process; when you begin to combine these with phototextures and well-thought out lighting effects, you can quickly create a visually interesting piece of art that sells your environment idea.

There are a few different ways to approach environment design: for sci-fi and terrascape art the Shapes tool is invaluable, whereas for modern cityscapes starting with a photo plate can be much quicker. Other urban environments or detailed matte painting style artwork can benefit from 3D in the initial stages. And of course, many artists just use free form painting from start to finish, forgoing photos and other programs altogether. Experiment with these different methods until you find an approach that works best.

One quick trick is using magic hour lighting in your artwork. This creates dramatic mood, vivid colour and long shadows that are universally flattering.

Try creating a 3D base for your artwork, This, along with careful use of photo textures, can add a quick dose of realism to your design.

Detail can help sell your concept. Make sure that your key areas are appropriately rendered, but remember to leave space for the viewer's eye to rest!

Artist's secret
WORKING IN VALUES
If you're using complex light sources or shapes, working in black and white can really simplify the early stages. Try creating a black fill layer set to Color blending mode, so that you can check your work in monochrome.

Step-by-step: Creating a city environment concept
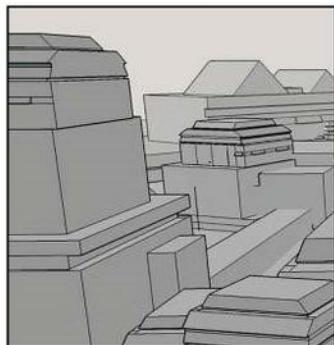
1 I'll be making a fantasy cityscape, so 3D is useful for establishing accurate perspective – the biggest killer of urban environments. I use SketchUp to block out a fantasy city by creating a few interesting buildings, and copying and arranging them throughout the environment. Using the camera function, I compose a snapshot to serve as a base for my 2D concept.

2 I import the file to Photoshop and use the image as a guideline, painting over the base using a simple colour scheme to preserve the shapes from my model. I try to avoid detail, remaining zoomed out while I block in the buildings of the picture. Don't feel locked into your 3D design – this is a good stage at which to add new large elements to your concept.

3 When you're happy with your design you can start adding detail. This can be done by hand or by using photo textures. When applying photo textures, make use of masks instead of the Erase tool and start out by using an adjustment layer to make sure the values of the photo match the values of your painting. If these two things don't match it'll never look right!

4 I decide to add an extra element to improve the overall composition. Bright red flags offer a complementary colour to make the rooftop gardens pop, as well as helping to lead the eye of the viewer around the image. After this stage I add two per cent grain and tilt-shift blur to the painting, as well as applying some linear dodge around the skyline to enhance the sunset.

Occlusion shadows help to push the three-dimensional feeling of what you're painting. Look for areas enclosed by surfaces and notice how the shadows are always darker there.

Question

What are occlusion shadows, and how should I apply them to my artwork?

Sara Pierce, England

Answer
Bram replies

When doing detailed lighting work I've gotten into the habit of simplifying each step of the painting process as much as possible. Focusing my attention on one aspect at a time helps to not become overwhelmed and almost always results in a much more thorough job.

One step in that process is concentrating on occlusion shadows, which occur where surfaces come together. A basic rule of thumb is that wherever areas are closed in by surfaces, shadows will occur. The inside of a mouth or an eye socket for instance will almost always be darker than the top of the nose or the forehead. They're a form of shadows best noticeable when there's no directional light present. So you can paint them on a separate layer without having to worry about the direction of the overall lighting, and then set that layer to Multiply to have it distribute the shadows on the objects below. In my example however, I do have a lighting scheme in mind with directional lights and cast shadows, but these build upon the occlusion shadows rather than replacing them.

Step-by-step:
Give an orc realistic lighting

1 Every good painting starts with a good foundation. In this case it's a quick line drawing that looks very simple, but has all the information in it I need to finish the painting. It shows the placing of all the facial features, but also where the cast shadows will fall and how the back lighting will push the silhouette forward.

2 Built upon the previous sketch is the occlusion layer. You'll notice that it's a very bright layer with light greyish tones in it, and the reason for that is that we don't want to overdo the shadows in the image. By keeping this layer light the Multiply layer won't 'burn' my friendly-looking orc character below.

3 With the occlusion layer in Multiply I paint over the line drawing with larger strokes to erase the big lines while keeping the major volumes. The lines aren't really needed since the layout of the elements is present in the occlusion layer, too. The heavy lifting is now mostly done and all that remains is adding colour and effects.

Question
What painting techniques can I use to put a person in a spotlight?
Dinah Trent, US

By keeping information out of the shadows and emphasising it in the light, you can easily create a convincing and compelling spotlit figure.

Answer
Houston replies

Lighting is never an easy thing to make convincing in a painting, but spotlighting in particular allows for a lot of simplification, which makes your job easier. Being the only light source in the image is definitely a component, but what really makes a spotlit figure both easy and convincing is the massing and subordination of the shadow shapes.

The key phrase to remember is: information in the light, no information in the shadow. Group your shadow shapes into big, distinct masses that have little to no form or detail. Because the spotlit figure is in a very dark setting, there won't be much in the environment for the spotlight to bounce off of and influence the shadows on the figure. These large, simplified shadow shapes are important to the composition as well as the spotlight effect, so try to design these well.

To balance this emptiness of the dark areas, all of the form and detail must be emphasised in the lit areas of the figure. Because there will probably be a lot of empty darkness in the image, the form, texture and colour in the light side needs to be really interesting to strike a good balance within the composition. Build up the form gradually and dramatically all the way up to a punchy highlight, the way an epic orchestral song builds up its powerful crescendo.

The key to creating a compelling spotlit figure is grouping your shadow shapes into simple masses. A simple composition is a strong composition.

Artist's secret
VIBRATING COLOURS

To achieve richness in colour, place small amounts of different colours of similar value next to each other in a few areas in your painting. This makes them 'vibrate' in the viewer's eye. The impressionist painters of the 19th century did this extensively in their art.
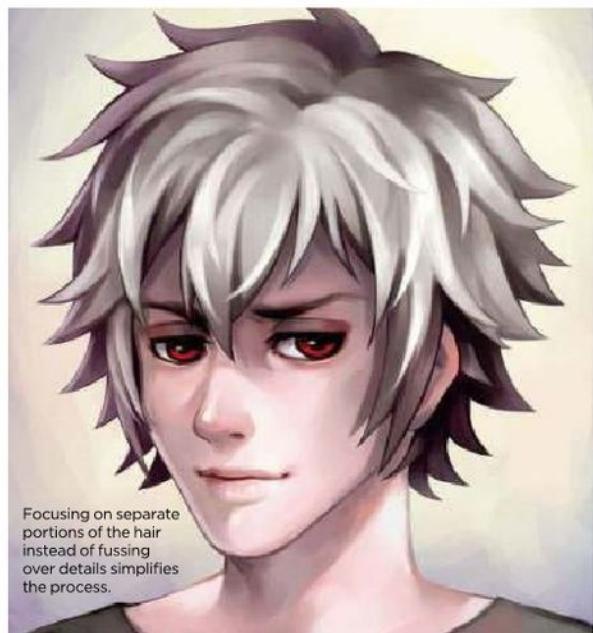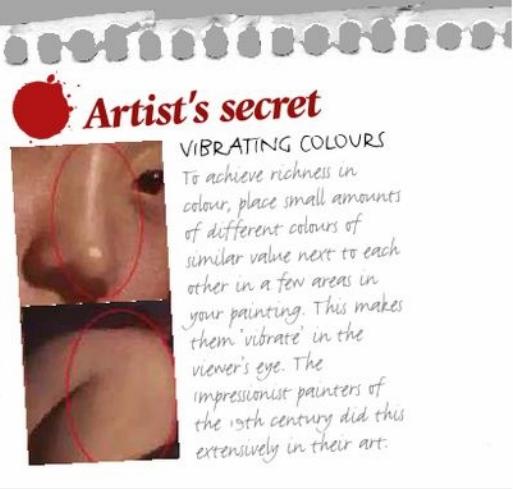
Question
My manga characters' hair never looks right. Where am I going wrong?
Alice Daniels, England

Focusing on separate portions of the hair instead of fussing over details simplifies the process.

Answer
Jia-Ying replies

Hair is always a tricky component to any character drawing. Whenever I begin a portrait, I usually have two things in mind when it comes to hair: the start of the flow (establishing the point of origin on scalp), and its overall movement – will it stick up in all directions, or form a gentle slope down the character's neck, for instance.

Planning the flow and movement, and making it convincing to the eye may seem like a challenge at first. Start off by looking at hair in simple sections, as opposed to attempting realism by painting every strand – which is a pretty respectable talent on its own, but not quite what we're looking for in manga style. Details like hints of stray strands can be added in later on.

As crazy as some manga hairstyles can get, it's important to play between fantasy and reality carefully. Essentially, what we're looking for is to create a believable hair structure that will not only complement the character's face, but also help in giving appeal and identity.

Question

Help me depict a dragon who's been in a few fights

Noah Crawford, US

Answer
Leesha replies

The ability to paint wear and tear can support both the characterisation of your creatures and the narrative of an illustration. Has your dragon been attacked with weapons or claws? If it gets into a fight, does it usually come out on top? The appearance of injuries can help the viewer answer these questions and more.

When you begin rendering in your scales, don't worry about painting wounds until the dragon's finished. Typically, scales are oval or diamond shaped. The scales on the face will be smaller than those on the body. You don't have to render individual scales. Focus on rendering the scales where the light hits the skin, because that's where the most detail will be present.

To paint a recent injury, use a saturated dark red to outline the gash, and fill it with a lighter red. Use dark pink in the middle of the wound for exposed flesh. Paint a subtle highlight around the edges of a wound for torn skin. If there's a lot of blood oozing out of the wound, add a few specular highlights to the drops of blood.

Consider adding some tears to a dragon's wings. On a new layer, paint in a hole using the colour of the background. Add some subtle pink colours around the edges of the tear to imply inflammation.

This battle-worn dragon is looking a little worse for wear, with scarring caused by claws wrapping around his neck, and scratches on his face.

Scars can be as simple as flaws in the scale patterns in a slightly darker colour. Add some subtle highlights to emphasise the edges of healed scar tissue.

Artist's secret

JUST A FLESH WOUND!
Blood will run into the creases of the dragon's scales. This will further emphasise their shape and form. Some scales can also be 'stained' with a subtle red colour.

Step-by-step: Paint manga-style hair in sections

1 I sometimes sketch out the bald head underneath beforehand, to give myself a rough indicator of where to establish the hairline. I always try to draw hair in thick masses, taking note of the point of origin: in this case it's roughly the top left of his scalp.

2 I drop the sketch layer's Opacity and use it as a guide to paint underneath on a new layer. I treat each section as a clump of hair, rather than single strands. Clumps create shadows over others; I play around with this, and make sure there's enough volume and credibility.

3 I use lighter values of the hair's base colour to add details, such as thinner sections of hair. This gives a more natural look, while also giving the impression of being slightly dishevelled. I add a thin, dark outline, and deepen the shadows that the hair casts over the face to introduce depth.

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VIDEO WORKSHOP

Question

My magical creature effects just look like standard Photoshop filters – how can I improve them?

Mai Yeoh, Canada

Answer
Charlotte replies

It can be tricky to design and paint magical effects from scratch. This is why there are so many custom brushes out there that have been created to make this process easier. However, if you take the time to understand how different specular effects are supposed to work, you'll find that drawing your magical effects by hand will make your painting not only more unique, but also more interesting to render.

The first step to making believable magical effects is researching the way that light behaves in different situations. Flames, fireworks, sparking, bio-luminescence, water fractals… all of these things make good starting points for light effects. Once you've chosen your references, think about how you can combine these effects. It becomes easier to make one effect flow into another if you add direction to your brushstrokes; make a decision about where your magic is moving to and stick to it. This will add realism to your painting.

When it comes to magical effects, blending modes can be helpful, particularly Color Dodge. If you find your picture is looking a bit lifeless, you can create a new layer in Dodge mode and gently add paint with a soft Round brush to increase the saturation of your other layers and give them an ethereal, glowing effect. Remember that the best-looking magical effects always preserve some translucency, so don't go overboard!

Combine super-saturated fractal patterns with natural elemental effects to create convincing magical auras for your creatures. Control the translucency of your layers as you experiment.

Pay close attention to the direction of your brush strokes. As long as you keep these consistent your magical effects will look flowing and natural.
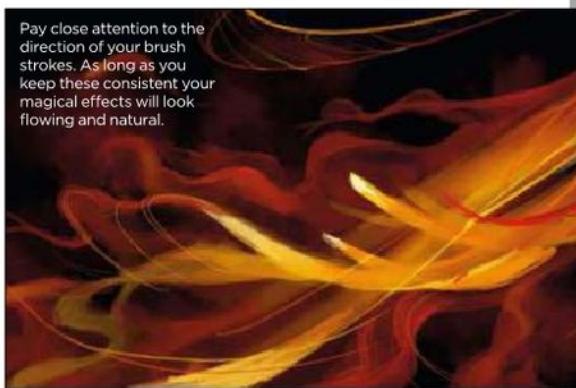
Artist's secret
BE INSPIRED BY FRACTALS

One great source of inspiration are natural fractals. No matter what you're designing – be it creatures, environments or effects – letting yourself be influenced by naturally occurring fractal patterns will add interest and beauty to your work.
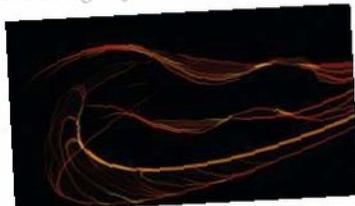
Step-by-step: Create a phoenix in Photoshop

1 First, create a basic silhouette and colour palette for your creature. If you're adding effects to a creature you've already rendered, just pick an existing colour from its body and change your HSB sliders so that both the saturation and brightness are set to a higher level. Use Soft brushes for the dark shades and Hard brushes for lighter ones.

2 Because I'm drawing a phoenix, I try to incorporate fire-based light effects by merging flames with long elegant fractals. I want my creature to be flying upwards, so all my brushstrokes should flow smoothly from the top right of my painting to the bottom left. I remove some colour from the chest and head of the bird to mimic the look of a flame.

3 For the epicentre of your effects, the light will usually be bright and opaque. You can use Color Dodge blending or Brush mode to quickly fill this in, or do it manually by turning both your Saturation and Brightness sliders up to 100 per cent. I'm aiming for a spark-type effect here, using a hot white colour and splintering straight lines.

Artist Portfolio

THE BEGINNING OF AN EPIC SAGA
Saga issue one introduced the star-crossed lovers Alana and Marko, and their baby Hazel who narrates parts of the story.

Th
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M mean, and I relish drawing those expressions," says Fiona Staples, probably the hottest artist in comics today.

She's talking about a pale, bat-winged spy character in Saga. With over 30 issues of the runaway hit indie title under her belt, the comic she created with writer Brian K Vaughan has bagged her 17 trophies: Eisners, Harveys, Schusters and more.

Saga is the tale of star-crossed lovers Alana and Marko, and their baby daughter Hazel. The couple come from different sides in a galactic war and when their treachery is discovered, it seems just about everybody in the universe is out to get them. As the title suggests, it's an epic tale of love and war across the stars.

Fiona doesn't seem as interested in the main characters as some of the quirkier ones. Another of her favourites is the horned grandma, Klara. Stern, cranky and

brutal… Klara's happy to spill blood to protect her family. And Fiona also enjoys drawing bounty hunter The Brand.

"With The Brand, I mainly just wanted to draw a woman who's sexy in an atypical way. Brian wrote this very cool, self-assured freelancer and I thought it would be great to have her look suave and masculine-presenting," she says.

WORKING AS EQUALS

Her working relationship with writer Brian is as good as it can get, and she has as much input as she wants. Fiona regards him as a bigger name in the industry – he does have about 10 years more experience than she does – but she feels she's always treated as an equal. They both co-own the title, which is published by Image Comics.

With its big themes of family, revenge and redemption, and its extreme plot twists, Saga could so easily have been a dark and gritty affair. But Fiona draws it with a light touch, using bright and lively colours. It's refreshingly unmasculine and that ➤➤

BLOWING A GALE
Special Agent Gale's cutting verbal style and violence make him one of Fiona's favourites to draw.

KIDNAP
Will this robot, with a television for a head, pay the price of absconding with the toddler Hazel, in issue 25 of Saga?

"I don't know where the Saga story is headed long-term, so I just take it month by month!"

MYSTERY SOCIETY
Working with Steve Niles and Ashley Wood on Mystery Society was a dream come true for Fiona.

GOING INDIE BUT REAPING THE BENEFITS
While DC owned 100 per cent of North 40, moving to Mystery Society Fiona was able to retain a 25 per cent royalty on the artwork – vital for the up-and-coming artist.

❝ I'm hoping creator-owned books become a viable option ❞

beating the likes of The Amazing Spider-Man, Justice League, Walking Dead and Marvel's Princess Leia. Yet the huge popularity that Fiona is experiencing at the moment isn't going to her head. Growing up in Calgary, and attending the Alberta School of Art and Design, the Eisner award is something she dreamed of winning. Now that she has one, she points to other artists who she thinks have more skill. She loves James Harren, Sean Murphy and Daniel Warren Johnson, for instance.

"I know that it's kind of 'my moment' right now, and the temptation is to strike while the iron is hot and put my name on as many projects as possible," she says. "But it was Saga that got me here, and I'm not going to jeopardise that series by taking other jobs, Archie being the exception. So that's what it's like: exercising will power and saying no to a lot more things!"

TEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

The huge respect she's receiving at the moment hasn't come out of the blue, and she's been working hard for a decade. Her first comic was Done to Death in 2006, featuring a nerdy vampire and a homicidal book editor. She took it on when she was still studying, drawing on acetate with a crow quill.

Another of her highlights is North 40, written by Aaron Williams, that features monsters in small town America. By then she was 100 per cent digital, emulating watercolour and using textures for a mixed media feel. It's got some of the hallmarks

➤➤ might just be why every issue is so eye-catching, with her watercolour-esque digital art on the cover.

Saga's success has spelled bigger things – if it's possible to get bigger than Saga itself. Fiona's now also drawing Archie, with its all-American retro hero Archie Andrews, and his friends Betty and Veronica. Dating back to 1939, the title has huge resonance in the US and its publisher has revived it with Mark Wiard writing.

For Fiona, the process is a little different to Saga. She explains: "I do full-colour work for Saga, and Archie is coloured by Andre Szymanowicz. This was meant to save me time, but it still takes me longer to draw Archie because everything has to look somewhat realistic. A car has to look like a real car and a school has to look like a school. In Saga I'd just draw some stupid dome thing or flying fruit."

Archie was the seventh best-selling comic when the new issue one came out in July,

HOW SAGA COMES TO LIFE

The epic space drama of love and war has become a hit, thanks to Fiona's exceptional art

Working alongside writer Brian K Vaughan, Fiona Staples is the artist behind Saga, one of the most eclectic and unusual comics you're ever likely to read. It's creator-owned, and perhaps that's the reason why it ever saw the light of day.

"I never felt like a hired gun. All Saga decisions are made by both of us, from scheduling to foreign edition deals to T-shirt designs," says Fiona.

"I don't know exactly where the story is headed long-term, so I just take it month by month! Hazel is growing up fast, and the rest of the family is ageing a bit as well, less obviously. I try to have their appearance reflect their circumstances. The last story arc saw the family separated, and Marko and Alana looking pretty haggard. When we come back to them they're going to be more in adventure mode."

Like her other comics, Saga is drawn digitally using Photoshop and Manga Studio. "I love being able to work in colour, instead of having to scan in inks and colour afterwards. Digital is freeing to me, because I can get the image in my mind onto the screen with very little interference. For instance, I can pick a colour with a click instead of washing my paintbrush and mixing the colour on a palette every time. I can paint white-on-black as easily as black-on-white. There are no physical barriers to worry about," she says.
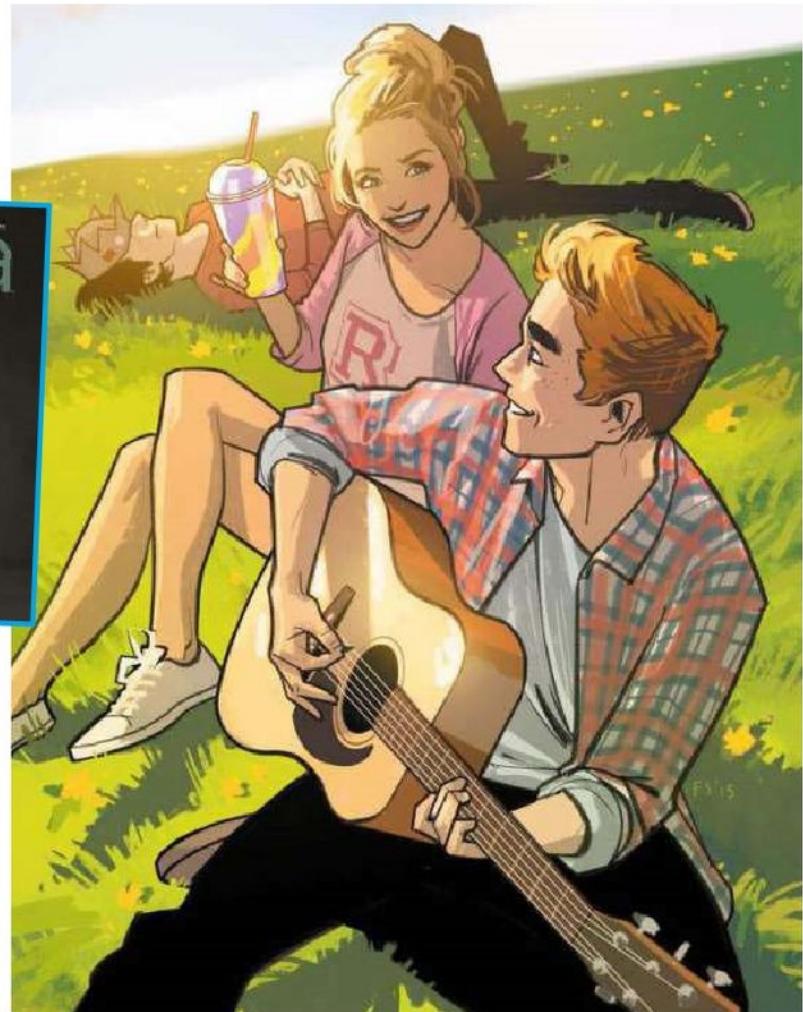
GOING UP IN THE WORLD OF SAGA
The Brand (wearing the tie) and her young ward Sophie (glasses) embark on a climb in issue 29 of Saga.

ARCHIE
This title couldn't be more different to Saga in so many ways. Will it be the right next step for Fiona Staples? Early signals are positive.

ROCK STAR
An uncoloured centre-spread from the first issue of Archie.

later seen in Saga, and came out through the DC imprint Wildstorm.

In 2010, Mystery Society came along and in it Fiona worked similarly to how she does now. "This book is significant because it's when I moved back to doing creator-owned work. I'd spent a few years doing work-for-hire for various companies and didn't mind, but I wanted at least a percentage of what I came up with," she says.

And perhaps that's one of the most inspiring things about Fiona's approach to comics. Not only has she been leading the way with unusual and thought-provoking artwork, she takes risks and wants to take ownership of what she creates – not sell it off to one of the big boys in the market.

"I know books like Saga are the exception, and most indie books can't be sustained for long, much less counted on to be profitable. But I'm hoping this will change and creator-owned books become a viable option for more creators.

"The more the market grows, the more indie titles publishers like Image, Boom, and Dynamite will be able to sustain, so I think it's crucial to make accessible comics for a wide range of tastes," she concludes.

Blazing Griffin's The Ship: Remasted is a high-definition remake of the original murder-mystery multiplayer.

BLAZING GRIFFIN

Creating artwork for indie games can be a rewarding, if hectic, experience. We chat to a small Scottish studio with big dreams

These days, there are more indie game studios in the UK than you can shake a stick at. But Blazing Griffin is a little different, says its creative director for games, Stephen Hewitt. Its size might be small but its dreams are big. "We're looking to create high-end indie games that will position us somewhere between quality indie and triple-A," he says. "We're a young and precocious studio that has done a lot of things that larger and less-agile studios wouldn't even consider. And it's worked out pretty well so far."

It's still early days for the studio. Set up in Edinburgh in 2011, it's learning as it goes. In 2012, for example, it launched an unsuccessful Kickstarter campaign to fund a sequel to The Ship: Murder Party.

Stephen says this wasn't an entirely negative experience. "The failure was more down to our own ignorance over how Kickstarter works than anything inherently wrong with what we were trying to do," he explains. "And we learned a lot of valuable lessons about crowdfunding along the way."

LOVE LETTER

It's shelving the Ship sequel for the time being and instead starting work on The Ship: Remasted, an HD remake of the original title, which it acquired when the original developer, Outerlight, went out of business. Another ongoing project is

> **We're a precocious studio that has done things big studios wouldn't consider**

Distant Star: Revenant Fleet, a real-time, space-strategy game for PC launched with last November that boasts some stunning looking spacecraft and alien environments.

"Distant Star was a bit of a love letter to sci-fi artists like Chris Foss and Syd Mead, as well as films like Blade Runner and the game Homeworld," says art director Paul Scott Canavan. "I always loved the vibrant visuals of that game and the way Blade Runner was lit has always been hugely inspiring to me. Shape design was important in Distant Star and I wanted to simplify the ships as much as possible, to make them instantly readable as different factions."

But although the work is rewarding, it has to be done quickly. "The biggest challenge I have day to day is just managing several projects at once," Paul says. "It's ➤➤

Distant Star: Revenant Fleet is a real-time, space-strategy game for PC.

LOCATION: Edinburgh, Scotland
PROJECTS: Distant Star: Revenant Fleet
OTHER PROJECTS: The Ship: Remasted, APB Retribution, Dino Tribes
WEB: www.blazinggriffin.com

SEAN MCILROY

On life at the cutting edge of indie gaming art

What's your background?
After studying Illustration and printmaking at art college, I started off in animation then made the change to illustration. I got involved with games by helping out with concept art for Abertay University students who needed an artist. I'd contact people who had left ads on the art college noticeboard, and it spiralled from there.

What does your role involve?
I work on concepts, game textures, graphic design, and recently many aspects of the 3D work required in the studio. I'm constantly learning new skills that I can put into practice, while also bringing my traditional art and design experience to the team. A typical day might involve setting up collision for all the staircases in a game level, and in the afternoon helping with logo rebranding.

How did you get the job?
After my previous role at a smaller games company came to an end, I really wanted to continue working in games, and I knew the Blazing Griffin guys were really pushing hard in the Scottish games scene. I contacted Paul Canavan in regards to future employment, and as the guys already knew my work and background, they brought me on board almost instantly!

What's the latest project you've worked on?
Recently we've been working on The Ship: Remasted, and I've honestly learnt more than I ever thought I could. Some of the areas where I feel I've developed the most include lighting (both traditional and digital), textures and modelling.

What process do you follow when creating game artwork?
We're all pretty big advocates of drawing here. Most of my ideas begin with a sketch. I always carry a sketchbook and pencil case. We also share all of our work and concepts round the art team for feedback. I feel this is an important step in developing work, moving on, and not getting too bogged down, by always offering each other inspiration and ideas.

What's the working environment really like at Blazing Griffin?
Professional, yet fun. We take part in many activities including art class, post work drinks, and playing games with each other. Everyone gets on really well, everyone is willing to help, and most people here will tell you it's more of a family than anything else.

APB Retribution is a top-down tactical combat title for iOS. This atmospheric artwork appears on the game's mission screen.
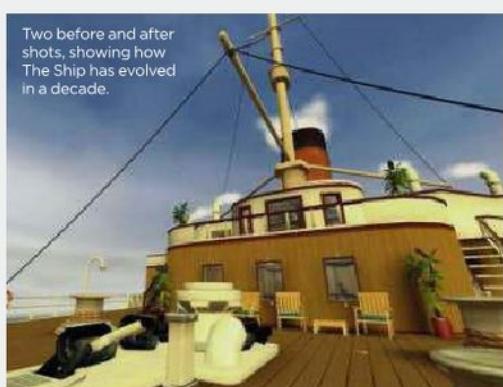
Two before and after shots, showing how The Ship has evolved in a decade.

Sean joined Blazing Griffin in 2014. He previously worked at creative studio Lucky Frame, where he won a Scottish Bafta for the game 'Bad Hotel'.
www.seanmcilroy.com

The team hard at work, with producer Melissa Knox in the foreground.

Dino Tribes is a free to play, match-three puzzle game for Windows Phone.
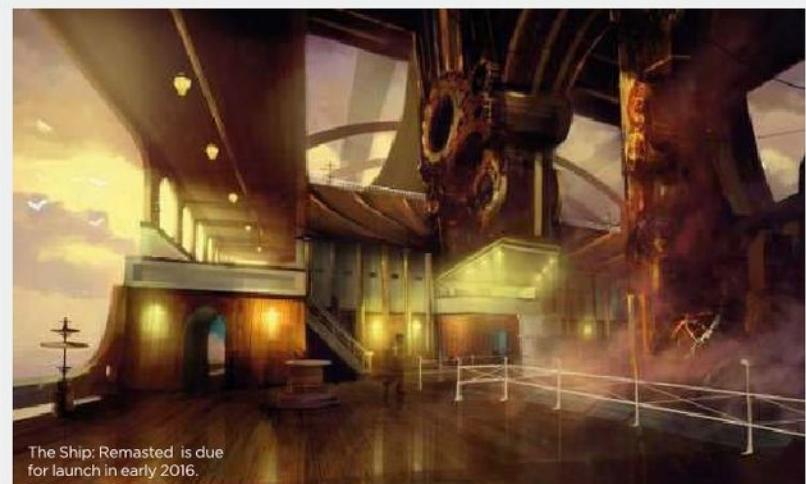
The Ship: Remasted is due for launch in early 2016.

➤➤ pretty rare for my role to exist on one game alone: I'm generally doing some concept on this project, some preproduction on another and maybe a bit of sketching for stuff I know is coming up in the future. It's definitely exciting to jump between projects and push my creativity but it can get a little overwhelming."

Paul approaches each project in a different way. "My process changes all the time," he says. "Sometimes I'll start on paper and scan the image into Photoshop, other times I'll begin with silhouettes and use light to carve into them. I've been experimenting with 3D lately and trying to see how it fits into my workflow – I think it's important to try everything these days, there's no reason not to experiment."

And it's important to go the extra mile to get it right, he believes, because superior art direction can help a small company like Blazing Griffin bat above their weight.

"Strong art design can elevate even a simple video game to something so much greater," he enthuses. "The most important aspect of concept art isn't your ability to paint, it's your ability to think and to be imaginative. Games like Monument Valley, Journey and Limbo are well designed but without their astonishing art direction I doubt they'd have had the impact they did."

So what's it like to work at Blazing Griffin? "For me, it's the best example of a

In Distant Star: Revenant Fleet you take control of a near-destroyed spaceship armada, and must rebuild your forces.

small studio atmosphere with big studio aspirations," says 2D/UI artist Searra Dodds. "We have a lot of daft office traditions, including ping pong tournaments and Ham Day – the official Blazing Griffin holiday. We are a pretty silly team, but we also have a lot of passion and drive to create beautiful, immersive, fun games."

A recent starter, junior programmer Martin Scott tells a similar story. "The company is like a large family," he says. "Being fairly small, all departments work closely together, meaning everyone gets to know everyone else. We often end early on a Friday to mingle and play games."

TALENT SPOTTING

If that sounds like your kind of office, Stephen urges you to consider working at Blazing Griffin. "We're always on the lookout for talented people, so I'd keep an eye on our recruitment page," he says. "There's plenty of space here for new starters to make a name for themselves, and a really great opportunity to grow as the company does likewise."

So what kind of artists is Blazing Griffin looking for? "People who can express themselves imaginatively, and can work semi-autonomously with a responsible attitude," says Stephen. "We'd rather be wowed by what artists can do, than have to bug them every five seconds to keep them on track. Also, we're looking for people who can all get along together," he adds. "The whole team gets a chance to hang out with potential employees before we hire them. And of course, that gives you a chance to see if you like us too!" ●

Distant Star: Revenant Fleet was launched via early access in April 2015.

Blazing Griffin developed APB Retribution in collaboration with Reloaded Productions.

Lead concept artist Paul, talks through his work with drop-in visitor Roseanna Cunningham MSP.

66 We're looking for people who can express themselves imaginatively and can work semi-autonomously 99
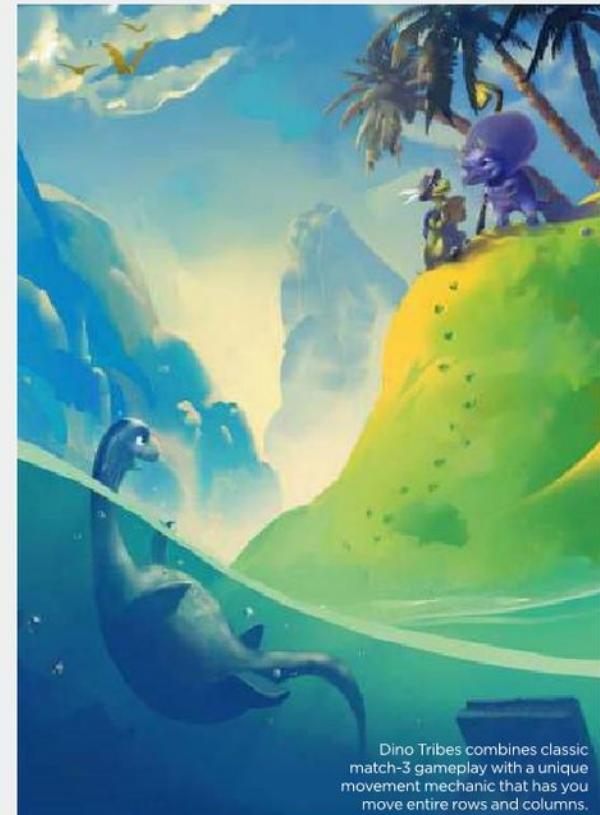
Dino Tribes combines classic match-3 gameplay with a unique movement mechanic that has you move entire rows and columns.

Sketchbook

Ken Lashley

The comic book artist opens up his sketchbook and reveals how it helps him get out of his comfort zone

Artist PROFILE

Ken Lashley
COUNTRY: US

Ken, otherwise known as Ledkilla, has worked in the world of comic books and illustration for well over 20 years, drawing celebrated characters such as Batman, Superman and the X-Men. But he's also collaborated with high-profile companies such as Hasbro, Lucasfilm and Mattel, creating artwork for their toy ranges and events.
www.ledkilla.tumblr.com

MIX 'N' MATCH

"I like this one because these things aren't supposed to go together, which makes for a fun sketch. I find that the better you can handle the finishing style, the more believable it will come across."

EVIL QUEEN

"I was looking at some Star Wars concept work that day and this was born. I do work for lots of different companies and although it seems like a ton of different styles it's really all the same. A drawing is a drawing – it's the focus of a certain piece that brings it to life".

I SEE YOU

"I was working on pushing the perspective a bit this day. I didn't go as far as I could have, but it's a start. I think each of us does things within our comfort zone – I try to get out of that when I doodle or sketch."

TROUBLEMAKER

"I've been doing comics in the traditional sense for years, so when I sketch I go over the top. When I work on Superman or Batman you don't get to create crazy stuff like this very often, so when the mood strikes me, I let loose with the pencil."

"Each of us does things within our comfort zone – I try to get out of that when I doodle or sketch"

Sketchbook
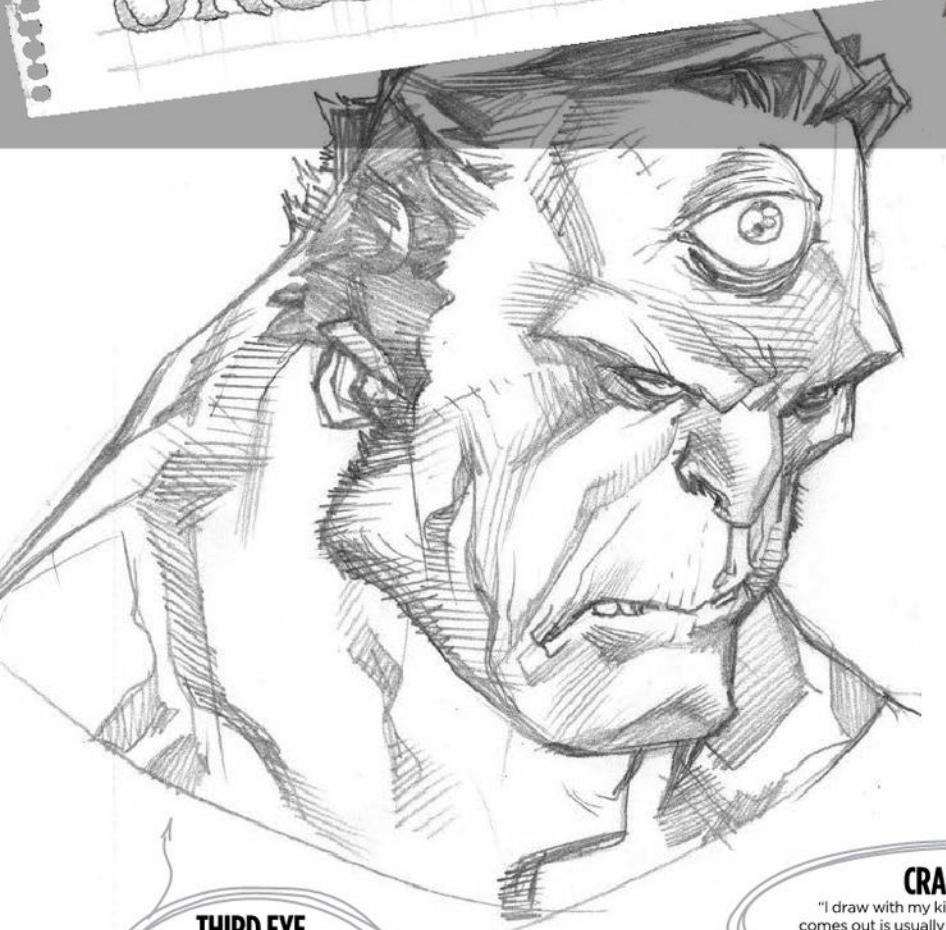
THIRD EYE

"This one grew from a conversation with my daughter. We often draw together: she gives me ideas and I have five minutes to draw something. These challenges really push me. I don't draw the things I'm good at – I'm drawing whatever comes to her mind."

CRANKY KID

"I draw with my kids all the time and what comes out is usually a mood taken from one of their stories. This one was from a cranky day at school. She loved this one. I like it, too."

FILLING THE ROOM

"I draw these sheets all the time. It's the 'first thing in my head' kind of drawing. Some fun things come out during one of these – I give myself 40 minutes and the idea is to fill every corner."

"When I let myself go, some strange things happen"

FEMALE LOKI

"I was doing some covers for Marvel, and while looking for reference I came upon a female Loki image. Later that night I started doodling and this was born. This is more like what I do when I draw comics, but it's a bit more cartoony. I like this one because it shows a bit more range. I'm known for my crazy energy and power in my work – here, I tried to show a bit more emotion. It's a work in progress."

GROOVY FUN

"When I let myself go, some strange things happen. Of all my fast five- to 10-minute sketches, this one stuck a chord. It's far removed from what I'm known for. I think that's great. Sure, I have a long way to go, but as long as I'm drawing it's all fun."

THAT AIN'T NATURAL

"I like to stretch things, and here's an example of that crazy anatomy. These can pay off in later professional work – one never knows what the next gig will be."

Workshops assets are available...
Download each workshop's WIPS, final image and brushes by turning to page 6. And if you see the video workshop badge, you can watch the artist in action, too.

ImagineFX
VIDEO WORKSHOP

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS

ImagineFX
Workshops

Advice from the world's best artists

56

60   **66**   **74**

This issue:

SketchBook Pro & Photoshop

HOW TO PAINT A GIRL AND HER TANK

Cartoonist **Brett Parson** presents his take on the iconic Tank Girl, using the drawing tools of SketchBook Pro and colouring techniques in Photoshop

ImagineFX VIDEO WORKSHOP

Artist **PROFILE**

Brett Parson
LOCATION: US

Brett is a freelance illustrator and comic book artist from America's East Coast. Recently he's worked on a comic series for DC/Vertigo called New Romancer, and on the 21st Century Tank Girl title for Titan Comics.
http://ifxm.ag/bparson

RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

So I must have been either 11 or 12 years old when I first discovered Tank Girl. A comic book museum that I would go to, often several times a month, was having an exhibit of all the artwork from the original series. This was my first introduction to Tank Girl, to the art of Jamie Hewlett (now famous for creating the cartoon band Gorillaz), and to the bizarre slap-stick writing of Alan Martin… it would change my young brain forever.

It was the first time I realised that comics can be fun. Twenty years later and I've had the honour of working with Alan Martin on a few Tank Girl stories, which are hopefully helping a whole new generation of warped young minds to discover her.

Now if you're thinking, "Who the #$@! is Tank Girl?", do yourself a favour and buy as many books as you can. But if you're already a fan, then you'll understand how excited I was when

ImagineFX contacted me about having her on the cover. This workshop reveals my process of creating an image of Tank Girl from the rough sketch and final line work in SketchBook Pro, to the finished colours in Photoshop. It'll help to have an understanding of basic drawing methods, and how to treat light and shadow. But all of these techniques can be applied to a wide range of skill sets and styles. So strap on your boots, slap a Band Aid on your head, and let's have some fun!
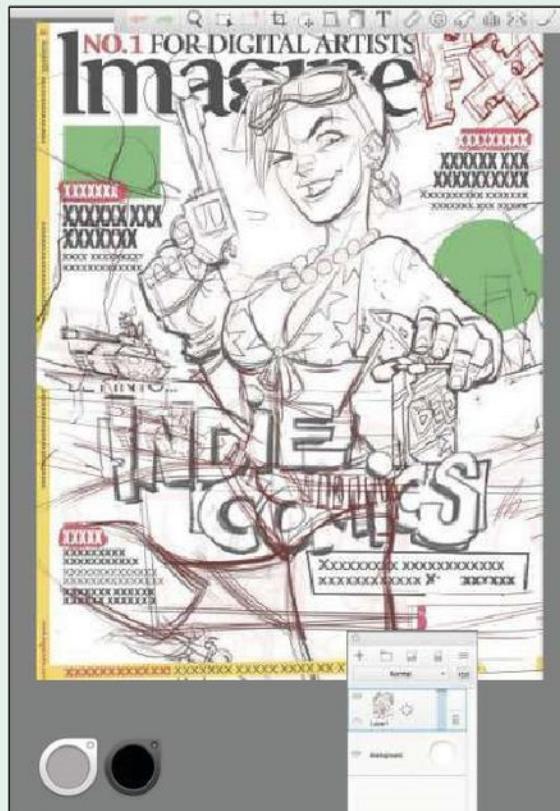
1 Rough sketch
I find SketchBook Pro to have a much more natural feeling for drawing than Photoshop. And its rulers and circle tools can't be beat. So using SketchBook Pro, I create a sketch of how I want the cover to look. This gives me an idea of how everything will fit together; it takes into consideration where different cover elements, such as text and titles, will go.
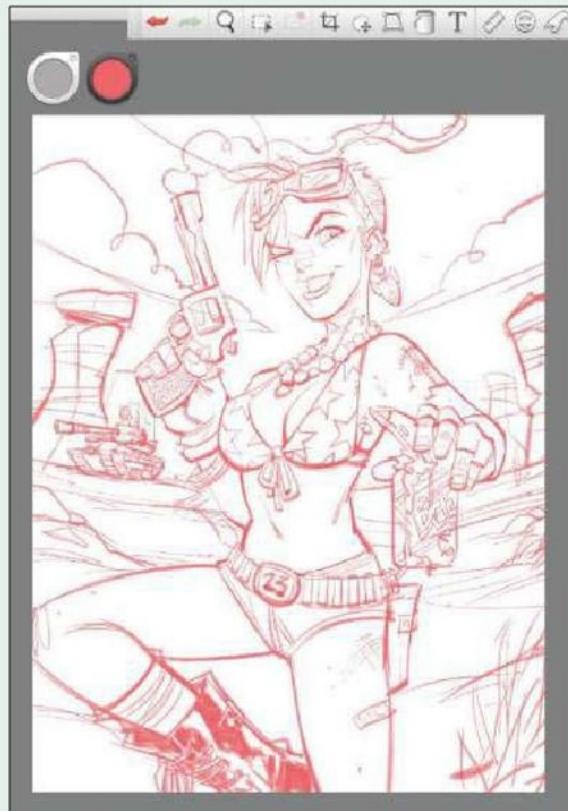
2 Clean up the sketch
Sometimes it seems like overkill, but I often do a trace of the roughs to clean things up before I move on to finished lines. I lower the Opacity of the existing layer, and create a new layer on top of that. Using a light colour and a soft Pencil brush I quickly trace over the image, adding a few elements and removing some that I no longer want. ➡

Workshops

3 Finishing the line work

Now it's time to clean up the drawing and tighten up the lines. Again, I lower the Opacity of my current layer and create a new layer. I use a modified Pencil tool and a darker colour to trace over the sketch below, adding variation in line weight to give the drawing more personality.

4 Layering the drawing

As I'm drawing my finished line work, I break the drawing up using separate layers. This makes it much easier to edit colours and add depth in the colouring stage. In this drawing I create a layer for the foreground, and for the background. If there were other characters or elements I would usually place them on their own layer as well.

5 Blocking flat colours

Now that I've finished my line art, I start the colouring process in Photoshop. I create a new layer under each layer of line drawings, and fill in that element with a solid colour. Then holding down either Cmd (Mac) or Ctrl (PC) I click the colour layer to select it, and fill in all the different colours.

6 Adding colour holds

Changing the colour of the lines can take things up a notch. To do this I hold Cmd (Mac) or Ctrl (PC) and click a layer of line art (this will select only the lines). I then colour over the lines, usually only on Tank Girl's skin and lighter objects in the scene. I try to not go too crazy; it's very easy to go overboard during this stage – the voice of experience!

7 Time for some cel shading

Now I add animation-style cel shading. I create a new layer, set it to Multiply and place it between the colour and line art. Then I add shadows, using a light grey brush at 100 per cent Opacity. By setting the layer to Multiply it enables the colours underneath to show through, but become darker.

8 Airbrush shading

Using the Wand selection tool on the layer of colours enables me to select certain areas to work on at a time. Next, I create a new layer that's set to Multiply above the colour layer. I select an Airbrush tool on a very low Opacity (which is also set to Multiply), and add gradient shading and pink skin hues where I want them.

9 Adding highlights

I create a Screen layer above my layers of shading. Then I select the colour layer, hold down Cmd+Alt (Mac) or Ctrl+Alt (PC) and click the Cel Shading layer, which has the effect of deselecting the shadows. With an Airbrush tool on a low Opacity level and using the colour of each area that I'm working on, I'm now able to add highlights where necessary.

10 Colouring background elements

Now I fill in the different colours of the background, making sure to pick colours that don't blend with or drown out the main character. Using a different palette helps if there are elements in the background that I want to stand out. For example, I want the tank to be visible, and so using cool colours helps it pop against the warm sand.

11 Background shading

I create a new layer set to Multiply above the background colour layer. I select an Airbrush tool on a low Opacity that's also set to Multiply, and add shading to both help add depth and make the character pop from the background more. I mask off areas using the Lasso section tool so that they're ready for airbrushing, which helps to add even more depth.

12 Background colour holds

On the background line art layer, I'll often use either the technique from step six, or I'll use the Hue/Saturation tool to change the colour and darkness of the lines. This is one instance where having the line art on separate layers comes in handy. I find that making the background lines lighter than those of the character introduces added depth.

Shortcuts
Eye Dropper
Alt (PC & Mac)
I'm constantly using the Eye Dropper tool to grab colours from different parts of the drawing.

13 Using colour correction

I'll play with the overall palette throughout the colouring process. By using Hue/Saturation, Color Balance and Brightness/Contrast I'm able to change tones of different colours and different shadows. The ability to play with colours at any stage of the piece is one of the biggest benefits of working digitally.

14 Adding pulp texture

As a finishing touch, I add a subtle paper texture to the artwork to help knock back the digital vibes. I scan in a suitably old piece of paper, then copy and paste it on to a new layer that's set to Multiply. Then I adjust the Brightness/Contrast and layer Opacity to achieve the desired level of texture. And there you have it: a girl and her tank! Hope you enjoyed the workshop.

Photoshop, Illustrator & mixed media
GIVE TINTIN THE FABLES TREATMENT

Nimit Malavia combines traditional and digital media as he develops an engaging Tintin cover, painting the familiar while finding his own voice

Artist PROFILE

Nimit Malavia
LOCATION: Canada

Nimit has produced art for major comic publishers such as DC/Vertigo, Marvel and Dark Horse. His personal work has appeared in galleries in the US and Europe.
www.nimitmalavia.com

RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

Developing artwork for a cover is rarely simple. You must maintain the fundamentals of a standalone image, such as a strong composition with an interesting palette. But the cover also has to engage the reader so that it's not only appealing to look at, but also brings them into the story. Having seen some of my covers for Vertigo's Fables series, the ImagineFX team suggested we take a swing at another established character: Tintin.

Working on famed properties such as this is exciting, but it brings a challenge of interpreting the figure in a way that enables me to paint an image that satisfies my creative needs, while also remaining true to the character's original spirit.

This workshop will focus on showing the choices I make in conceptualising the piece. It will give you a full process breakdown of the technical aspects of creating this image: touching on the different stages of roughs and approval; working up the image with traditional media; building the colours and values using an excessive amount of layers in Photoshop; title design; plus some personal techniques I use to re-inject some mystery into the final art.

MENAGERIE   CANNIBAL JUNGLE   SPACE RACE   JADE DRAGON
MOEBIUS MODULES?   AEROPLANE ESCAPE   MAYAN CAVE   REVENGE

PRO SECRETS

Leaving room for change
When building a consistent working process, it can be difficult to keep the results feeling fresh. Often, once the piece is nearing completion, I'll apply adjustment layers, and effects, such as Curves, and experiment with dramatic changes on the graph to see how I can affect the image. I usually focus on shifting the hierarchy of the values.

1 Narrowing the field

I often begin a character-based project by researching all aspects of their history, trying to find something to connect with. In the case of Tintin it was understanding that throughout his life he has been our gateway to unknown worlds and adventures. A perfect canvas. Once that ball was rolling, the ideas couldn't be stopped. In Photoshop, using a customised Round brush that emulates a ball-point pen, I develop eight black and white thumbnails – each with its own unique story and setting. I can't decide which one to go for, so I send them all to the ImagineFX team for approval and a decision.

- HERGÉ -

THE ADVENTURES OF
TINTIN

2 Decisions of direction

We narrow it down to two options: Mayan Cave and Airplane Escape. Either idea would've been a joy to execute, but as exciting as the rope-ladder escape would have been, it makes Tintin feel like an action star rather than someone who is being swept up in the adventure, as he is in the comics.

3 Revising and refining

Now I begin revising the line drawing, making decisions on the design of the characters, environment, placing the blacks and using different elements to help navigate the viewer's eye – the shape of the fire, for example. I try to be as economical as I can at this point, keeping the lines simple and not investing too much time in the details.

Shortcuts
Inverting the image
Cmd+I (Mac)
Ctrl+I (PC)
This helps me to see the Black and White balance.

4 Pencil to paper

From there I print out the image to be traced, using a light box and a 2H pencil, on to a 14x21-inch sheet of BFK Rives. Once the basic shapes are down, I switch to a Faber-Castell Schwarz Black and begin drawing proper. Along with articulating the details, I want to solidify my blacks.

5 Laying down flats

As my digital process becomes more and more involved, it's essential that I take the time to create aliased colour flats. They serve to help make quick selections on different elements of the image that I might want to isolate and treat individually, especially in a dense composition. Keeping them aliased also helps to ensure crisp selections.

6 Setting the lighting scheme

After laying down the colour flats I establish where my light source will be, and how the shadows will play on the figures and elements. I develop these with numerous Multiply layers, using an adjusted oil pastel brush, building the shadows of the piece in a very gradual way.

7 Painting in values

While the image is currently poorly detailed, I'm careful not to overpolish it. One usual pitfall is to render the same level of detail throughout the image. Despite all the articulation, it can feel static in the end. So I concentrate on more expressive painting techniques for the focal points, and limit the rendering in the secondary areas.
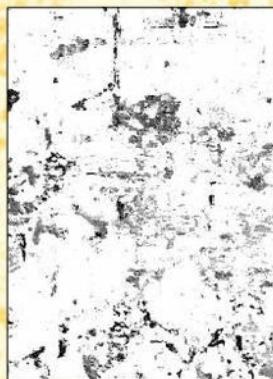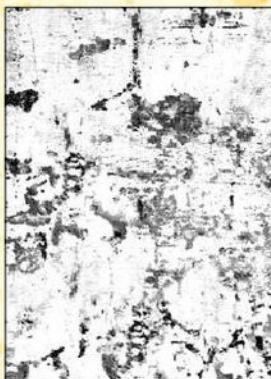
8 Bringing in analog elements

Usually by this stage of the process I start to worry about that dreaded static feeling coming in. So I begin reintroducing textures over the top of different layers to vary the look or enhance the inherent grit of the paper. In this case, I place two textures from a grunge set with reduced Opacity over the top of the sculpture layers.

9 Warmth in the cool areas

I need to bring some warmth and glow to the sculpture in the background. Using a gradient map adjustment layer and careful layer masking, I begin painting out the glow from the flames on the affected stones behind Tintin. I go in over the top of a Normal layer to add some specular highlights to the sculpture.
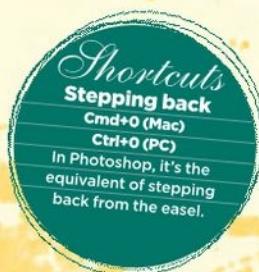
10 Attempting to spark an idea

Dissatisfied with how straightforward the colour palette has turned out, I begin introducing more destructive adjustments to the image, trying to spark an idea or any kind of change, using Selective Colour, Channel Mixer, Curves and so on. It does away with much of the work I've already done, but I find that Gradient Map offers the change I'm looking for.

11 Lighting a fire

Once I've finessed the colour choices from the original Gradient Map – the main goal being to find a complementary palette that unifies the image and keeps the warmth intact, using the flat selections in the layer mask – I begin dividing up the composition. This means I'm able to reduce the effect of the Gradient Map on certain elements, such as the fire.

Shortcuts
Stepping back
Cmd+0 (Mac)
Ctrl+0 (PC)
In Photoshop, it's the equivalent of stepping back from the easel.
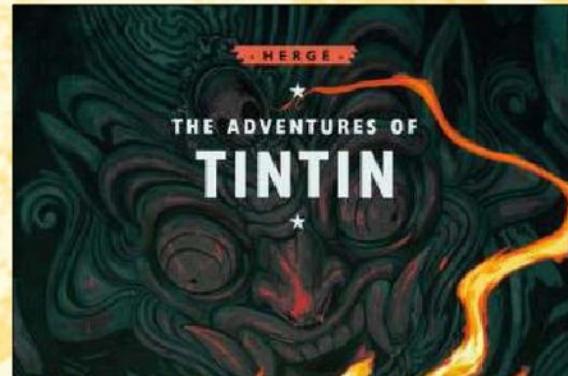
12 Bringing harmony back

At this final stage, I look for any adjustments that bring balance and flow back to the composition as a whole. I decide that the foreground elements need to be further separated, so I go back into the midtones and I repaint the shadows of the layers to bring the cooler eggplant tones in. I then apply a texture Overlay layer with a low Opacity.

13 Adding the title card

Customising and incorporating the title design into the image is one of the perks of the job I've luxuriated in most with my covers. It's a nice way to cleanly and cohesively wrap everything up. Since my execution is such a departure from Hergé's original creation, I decide that a simple traditional title treatment in Illustrator will be best.

PRO SECRETS

Limiting your colour palette

If you've started a drawing and find yourself uncertain how to proceed, building your values up in greyscale then applying limited colour using either an Overlay layer or Gradient Map adjustment layer can help to find a mood and focus for your piece. Experimenting with complementary warm and cool tones can be helpful, too.

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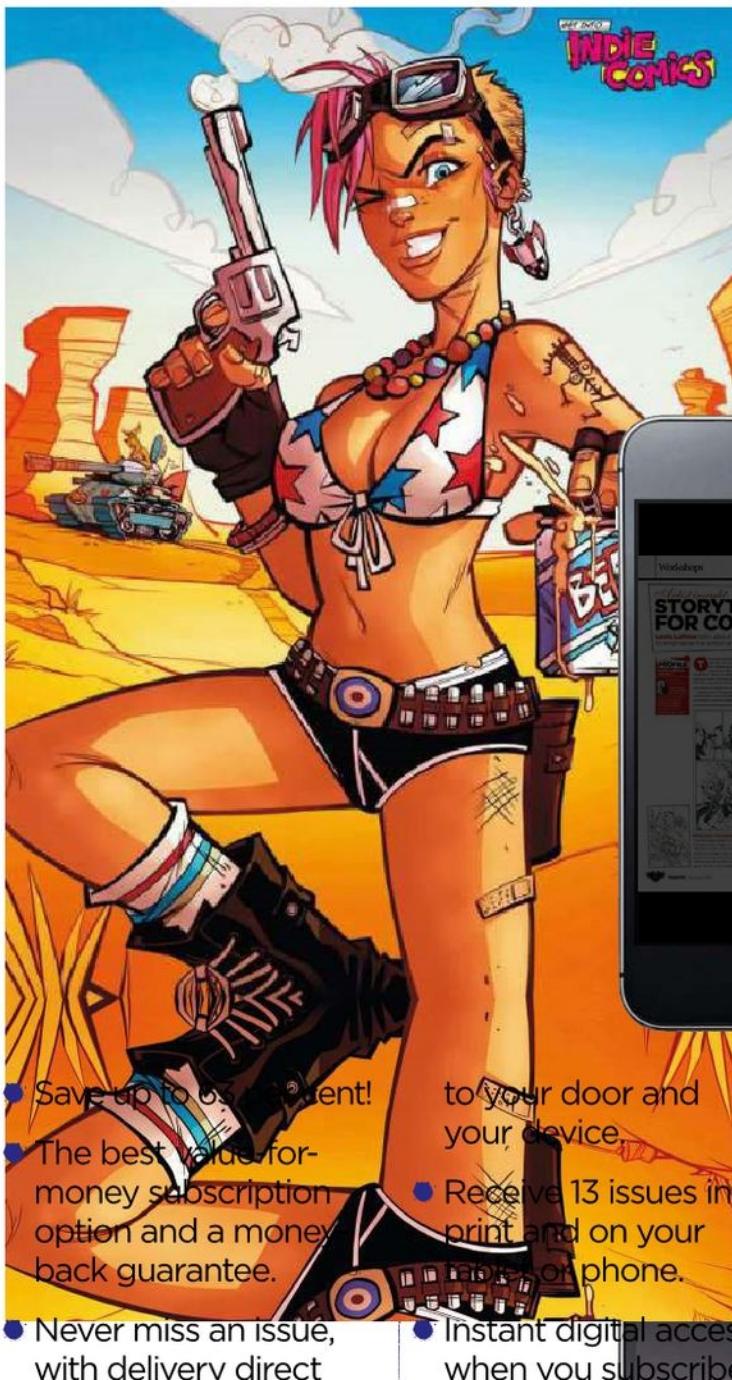
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Photoshop
CREATE VISUAL RHYTHMS IN YOUR ARTWORK

Anna Steinbauer reveals how she uses leading lines to guide the viewer's eye through her lush fantasy artwork

Artist PROFILE

Anna Steinbauer

LOCTATION: Austria

Anna is a freelance illustrator working mostly on book covers and card games such as Magic: The Gathering.
http://ifxm.ag/steinbauer

RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

This image started out as something I painted for fun, loosely inspired by Fantaghirò, a series of fantasy movies I loved when I was little.

I thought I could use the painting as a new header image for my blog, so the initial composition was very wide and not too tall. These dimensions quickly grew when I liked the idea so much that I wanted a full painting, and again when it was decided that it would be used for creating this workshop.

Recropping paintings with an already established composition can be difficult, but using leading lines effectively helps. Every image has lines – actual or implied – that lead the viewer's eyes through the composition. Placing these lines consciously gives you greater control over how your painting will be viewed and creates a sense of rhythm.

A lot of this boils down to doing what feels right, which becomes much easier with practice, but there are some general ideas to help get you started. Make an effort to arrange strands of hair, clothing, accessories and background elements such as plants or architecture to keep the viewer's eye moving within the image.

When a character's gaze leads out of the image, guide the viewer's eyes back in with trees and foliage. Use limbs to point towards the focal points and reinforce these lines with folds in cloth that go along the same angle.

Take a look at your favourite artists' works and try to find where and how they used leading lines in their work. ▶▶

Workshops

Shortcuts

Group selected layers
Cmd+G (Mac)
Ctrl+G (PC)
Helps keep track if you are working with many layers.

1 Getting the concept down

I start out with a super quick sketch to capture the composition and mood that I'm going for. At this point I pay no attention to the drawing at all – I just focus on the colours and the general layout. Then I refine the sketch a bit and decide to expand the canvas, which will enable me to show more of the characters and the background.

2 Clean Sketch

I gradually build up a clean drawing over several layers, paying close attention to the arrangement of the lines, especially in the cloth and hair. They should create a sense of rhythm, by creating both smaller and larger shapes and leading the eye through the composition in a flowing motion.

3 Starting to paint

Now I separate the characters from the background onto their own layers, so I can paint with big brushes while preserving the edges. Beginning with the main focal point - the knight's face - I define some features and paint in stronger colours and values. I stay true to the line drawing at first, but soon rendering the forms reveals some mistakes I did not notice before.

4 Changing the pose

At this point I have to leave the painting alone for a few days while working on other projects. Coming back to it, I realise that I don't like the knight's pose. I change the angle of her face using the Free Transform>Warp tool, and sketch in new arms. This new pose works better with the composition and conveys a clear sense of stern determination.

5 Recropping the image

What started as a personal painting with no size restrictions will now be used for a workshop, so I recrop the image to fit the required dimensions. Instead of cutting off the characters, I expand the canvas and include more of the surroundings. To keep the newly added areas interesting, I create a pleasing arrangement of lights and darks within the foliage.

6 Working on the armour

Initially I wanted the wing design on the pauldron to be etched into the metal, but I decide that a three-dimensional form is the way to go. I also clean up the arms I sketched in previously, starting with two simple values to establish the form and further defining details as I move along.

7 Repeating design elements

I spend time working on the armour, introducing a simple design element of repeating grooves, which helps add some cohesion to the overall design. As I paint, I have the light sources as well as the surroundings in mind, which create reflections in the metal. However, I keep them quite abstract to avoid making it look too polished or chrome-like.

8 Facial details

I'd already painted most of the knight's face at the beginning of the process, but now I add some minor details that should make a major difference. Specular highlights are a sure way to make eyes come alive, but I like to leave them out until the iris and eyeball are completely done. I also further refine the lips and overall facial structure.

9 Painting the dress

Now it is time to finally start working on the witch's flowing dress. At first I follow the lines of the drawing to stay within the established rhythm. Then I gradually erase the drawing on top, as I try to find ways to introduce more realistic folds and wrinkles into the larger shapes. ➡➡

Workshops

10 Layering in the background
I haven't touched the background since the early sketch stages. Now I work from back to front, adding trees and foliage layer by layer. These elements gradually become darker as they move closer to the viewer. To maintain an overall sense of depth in the scene, even the darkest trees in the background are still brighter than the foreground.

11 Detailing the armour
Going back to the armour, I create some decorative ornaments on another layer to add more detail. However, I quickly discard this idea, since it does not work well with the cleaner lines of the armour design so far. Instead, I go with the previously introduced grooves and play around with different arrangements until I find something that looks good to me.

12 Foreground foliage
I start defining some of the leaf shapes in the foreground and add some blades of grass in between. I also use different foliage brushes to give myself a base to work from. I make sure to stay within the established value groups so the details won't interfere with the overall image.

13 Foreground detail
With the help of some layers set to Overlay mode, I darken and saturate some parts of the painting. Then I proceed to gradually pick out detail within the foliage. This process is very relaxing and I could keep at it for hours, but I'm careful not to render these less-important areas too much, in case they draw too much attention to themselves. I also add some colour variations to both the background and foreground.

14 Finishing up
I make the witch glow more by painting a bright saturated turquoise around the edges on a layer set to Overlay mode. I also detail the armour some more and soften some edges all around the image. And that's it – the painting's complete. Hope you like how it turned out!

Krita Desktop
GETTING FAMILIAR WITH LAYERS

Learn about Krita's layers and find out how to use them to your advantage as **Katarzyna Oleska** explains the basics

CORE SKILLS

L ayers are a useful way of painting faster and more efficiently (you can find them via Settings>Dockers>Layers from the top menu). They also provide flexibility and enable you to control elements of your painting, together with the way they interact with each other. Layers are one of the key benefits of painting digitally.

In Krita Desktop you can create many different types of layers (Painting, Group, Vector, Filter, Fill and File), but the most important one is the Painting layer.

In between the layers you can change the way they affect each other by assigning a blending mode for each one of the layers. You can also group layers and turn them on or off, either one at a time or as a group. Let me explain more…

Artist PROFILE

Katarzyna Oleska
LOCATION: England

Katarzyna is a self-taught illustrator who works for various publishers and private customers, specialising in portraits, caricatures, fantasy and sci-fi illustration. She's known as an illustrator of some major book titles, such as Terry Pratchett's Discworld series.
http://lfxm.ag/kataro

1 Paint layer vs Vector layer

Some tools used on Paint and Vector layers will behave differently. On a Paint layer the Rectangle, Ellipse and Polygon tool shapes will be painted by a pre-selected brush, while on a Vector layer they'll become vector objects that you can select using the Shape editing tool and alter their shapes with the Path editing tool, as well as choose different outlines and fills (via the Tool Options docker).

PAINT LAYER

VECTOR LAYER WITH DIFFERENT FILLS

2 Blending modes and Opacity

Blending modes are grouped into categories in a drop-down menu in the Layers Docker (D). The top category (Favorites) shows all the blending modes that are checked in all the remaining categories. You can also use Opacity to control the layers. By experimenting with both of those variables you can create many interesting effects, and speed up your painting process.

LAYER 1
Opacity: 100 per cent
Blending mode: Normal

LAYER 2
Opacity: 100 per cent
Blending mode: Normal

LAYER 1
Opacity: 100 per cent
Blending mode: Normal

LAYER 2
Opacity: 100 per cent
Blending mode: Difference

3 Adjusting layers

If you select Layer from the top bar, a really useful drop-down menu will appear. Using that, you can rotate the layer, scale it, mirror it horizontally or vertically, merge layers with each other and even rasterise them. You also have the option to flatten the whole image. Similar options for you will appear if you select a layer from the Layer Docker and then click it with the right mouse button.

LAYER DOCKER

Some artists prefer to create paintings where each one of many layers has a specific purpose (line art, colour, shading, lights and so forth). To do this it's important to know how to name, position, clone and delete layers, and how to use Opacity and Blending modes.

A. Blending modes
Blending modes enable you to control how layers affect each other. Normal is the default option, but there are many other choices for you: Multiply, Lighten, Saturation, Color and so on. The best way to find out how they work is to experiment, and observe their effects in action.

B. Opacity
You can control the Opacity of a layer simply by moving the slider from left (0 per cent) to right (100 per cent).

C. Managing layers
You can change layer names and see a short preview of what they contain by hovering over them. With the icons to the right you can make layers invisible, lock them for editing, or lock the Alpha (transparency).

D. Cloning layers
Here you can create a new layer from a drop-down menu or clone the existing selected one.

E. Positioning layers
You can move an existing layer up and down the hierarchy, or move layers out or into groups of layers and also adjust the layer properties.

F. Deleting layer(s)
To delete one layer or many layers simultaneously, select them (to select multiple layers use Ctrl+click for choosing one by one, or Shift+click if choosing range of layers) and press the Bin icon.

Tell a story
The theme of the image is Evie vs the Tower of London. Here Evie is placed on a higher position than the tower to establish her dominance. The backlight makes her stand out more and adds some mystery to the character. These are very simple, but effective ways to tell a story in one image.

Using filters
I flip and transform part of the image, and change the Blending mode (usually Overlay), then use the Smudge and Displacement filters to create the reflection. I use boat illustrations, which I did earlier, to save time. I also review the perspective, luminosity and contrast so they blend in well. The reflections are lower in terms of luminance, compared to the light source.

Photoshop

DESIGN A GAME ENVIRONMENT

Tony Zhou Shuo creates an atmospheric environment for Assassin's Creed Syndicate, using light and shadow

Artist **PROFILE**

Tony Zhou Shuo
LOCATION: Singapore

Tony is a concept artist who worked on Assassin's Creed Unity and Syndicate while at Ubisoft Singapore.
www.artofzs.com

GET YOUR RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

This piece was created to establish the mood and important gameplay elements in Assassin's Creed Syndicate's Tower of London mission. The theme of the image is player versus the environment and in this case, it's the new playable character and master assassin Evie, versus the Tower of London.

The colour palette used here is complementary: specifically, mauve and pale yellow. The mission is a stealth mission, hence I knew it was important to create a clear difference between light and shadow in the environment.

As a high-level conceptual design, the main focus of this artwork was to establish atmosphere and reinforce the art direction. It's a great tool for level artists, lighters and level designers to visualise the space we have.

We wanted to focus on the big picture instead of fine details. At first, I came up with a few quick composition sketches, trying to find something epic and showing the scale. Once we had chosen one that we thought would work I produced a few lighting sketches, trying to capture the atmosphere we wanted.

Fortunately, it didn't take us too long before we realised our vision. From there on it was simply tweaking, blocking in and painting. For efficiency purposes, I mostly used photos, a 3D mesh from the game and my previous boat illustrations to block in contents.

Light emphasis

I place the moon behind Evie to push the silhouette and give it a romantic feel. The light direction creates planes of light and shadows that help emphasise the focal points. Local lights in areas of shadow generate interesting value variations and tertiary points of interest.
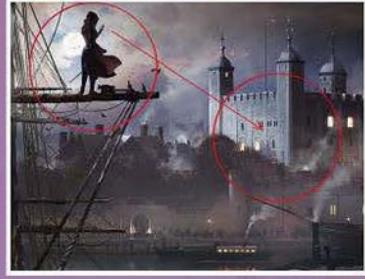
WORKSHOP BRUSHES

PHOTOSHOP

CUSTOM BRUSHES: DEFAULT ROUND BRUSH

I use this brush to block in values quickly. I also use it for polishing.

TEXTURE BRUSH

This brush helps to bring out some textures – in trees, for example

SMOKE BRUSH

I use this brush for introducing smoke or fog to the environment.

How I create...
A MOON-LIT SCENE IN HISTORICAL LONDON

1 Produce a rough sketch

This sketch was chosen because it had the most potential to deliver the atmosphere and lighting we wanted to see. The challenge here was the lack of height variation in the surrounding buildings, which made it hard to show depth. Flipping is always a good way to check if a composition is balanced.

2 Blocking in the scene

I use photos to create a base for painting later, paying attention to hue and value (check your values in greyscale using a black layer set to Saturation mode). I keep different planes on separate layers, so I can easily tweak them when necessary. Adjustment layers and clipping mask can be very useful here.

3 Painting the details

I tweak almost everything. I change Evie's pose, the height of the Tower of London and the surrounding buildings to refine the composition. To create depth, I play with the smoke and fog to create more layers and add a crowd in the distance to show scale. I always try to maintain the values that I've established in my sketches.

Artist insight
STORYTELLING TIPS FOR COMIC BOOKS

Lewis LaRosa talks about how to interpret scripts and lay out pages to emphasise the action and enhance the narrative...

Artist PROFILE

Lewis LaRosa
LOCATION: US

Lewis is a comic book artist whose work includes launching and designing The Punisher MAX. He's currently exclusive to Valiant Comics, illustrating Bloodshot: Reborn.
http://ifxm.ag/l-larosa

The comic book artist's job is to visualise the writer's script in the clearest way possible. If comics were films, the artist would direct, shoot, act, design the costumes, make the props and do the VFX. The amount of control you have over the book is really very exciting.

Comics aren't TV programmes or films, and have their own storytelling tools. It's amazing how much the shape, size and order of the panels affect the narrative. Layout alone plays a crucial part in moving the reader's eye, the pacing and rhythm of the action, the importance of certain story beats, and whether or not a scene is peaceful, full of dramatic tension, or dominated by crazy action.

There's no one right way to interpret a script and visually tell a story other than to make it easily readable, as engaging as possible, and true to the writer's intent.

Collaborating with your writer and editor – and even your inker and colourist – can really be beneficial by not only making sure everyone's on the same page, but for bouncing ideas around.

Using Bloodshot issue 25 as an example, I'm going to guide you through the different layout and camera angle techniques a comic artist uses to pace the storyline, highlighting the action and the emotion along the way.

1 PACING TECHNIQUES
The first three panels on page 11 of Bloodshot 25 are all the same size, shape, on the same row, and are relatively small compared to the big fourth panel where the Stalker Dog soldiers burst into the room and attack the main characters. Those first three panels were all about building up to the fourth explosive panel. Tension and release.

2 RELATIVE PANEL SIZE
Maximise the size of the most important panel on the page to increase its impact. The second panel on page 12 of the issue, where Stalker Dog soldiers fire away at Bloodshot, was easy to identify in the script as the most exciting panel on that page, so it was drawn to dominate the page. The first panel and last panel are reduced to quick before and after cuts.

3 MONEY SHOTS

Let's jump back to pages two and three of Bloodshot 25, written by the legendary Peter Milligan. They were written as a double page title spread meant to introduce our hero in action. I'm paraphrasing, but the script for the large, main panel reads, "Bloodshot in the middle of a firestorm in Aleppo, Syria. Bombs explode around him. A number of dead fighters and ruined hardware at his feet." I went with a full body shot, making sure his trademark red chest circle was clearly visible, with his military armament and ability to take punishment (he's getting shot in the shoulder). I chose a low angle (horizon line around his knees) to make him imposing and larger than life. He's charging and firing as if he's about to trample the reader and leap off the page. Tilting the camera makes it dynamic and enhances the frenetic feel of the scene.

> ❝ It's amazing how much the shape, size and order of the panels affect the narrative… ❞

4 PANEL SHAPES

I love using odd panel shapes, but only to give the storytelling impact. As a rule, I only use them to heighten excitement, particularly in action scenes. Care should be taken so that the storytelling remains clear, arranging the panels so they flow into each other instead of confusing the reader. Compare these two pages: one of them is a talking heads page with traditional, straightforward panel shapes and arrangement, reinforcing that this is a relatively quiet, mundane scene. The calm before the storm. The other is an action page full of odd-shaped panels that convey a sense of chaos while still clearly directing the reader's eye across the page. Be sure the shape of the panel complements the composition within.

5 QUICK CUTS

Panel four on this page is what I refer to as a 'quick cut': a small, quick, transitional panel that I often draw overlapping the two panels it connects. Its small size and vertical orientation imply that the action within takes place in an instant – the eye's not meant to linger here.

> 66 **Breaking borders should only be done to enhance impact and aid the storytelling** 99

6 THE POWER OF SYMMETRY

On both these pages, I've used symmetry in the panel arrangement and in the composition of the first two panels to help get across an orderly, sterile feel to the sci-fi lab setting. The mood is calm and quiet, and the heavy use of blacks gives a sense of foreboding.
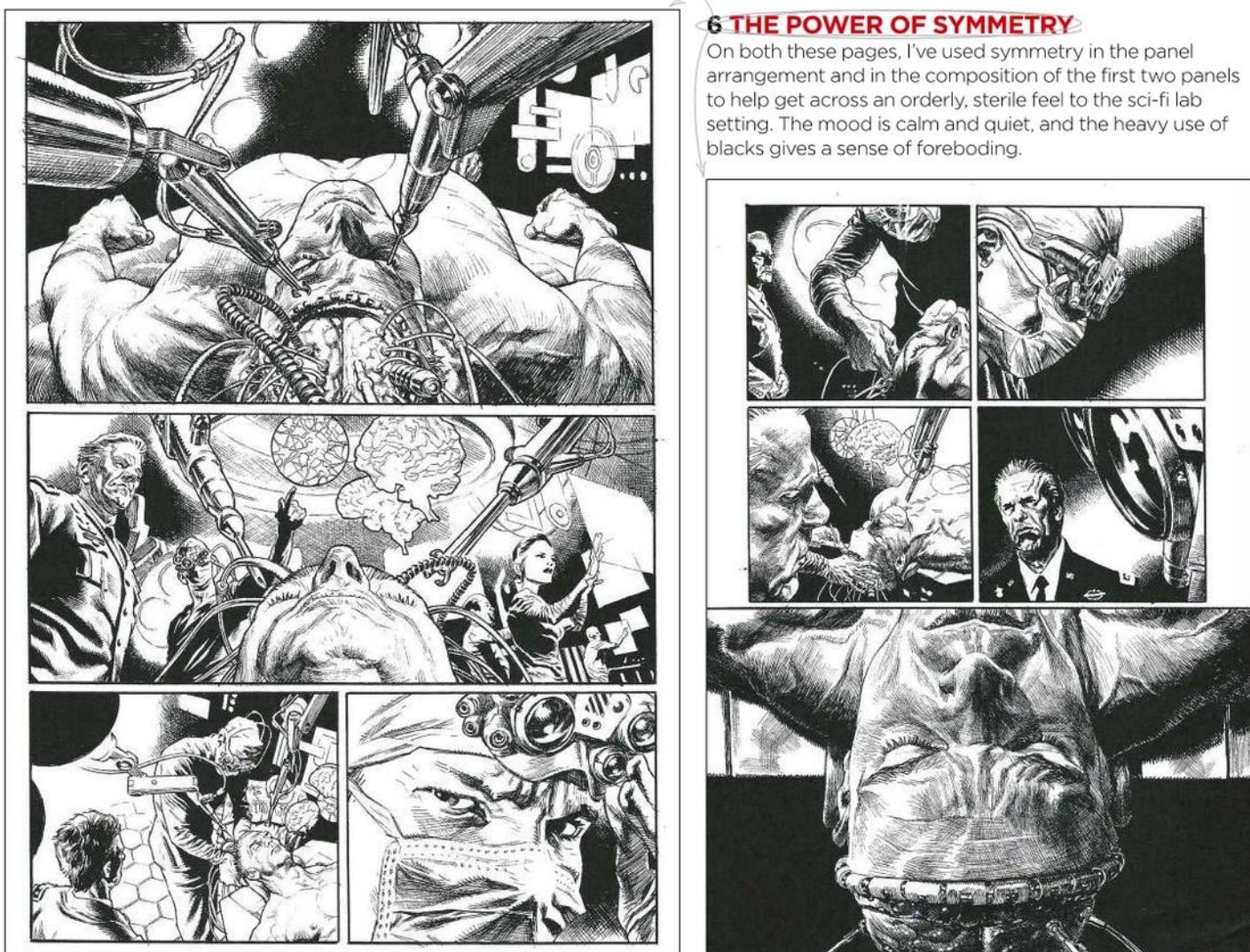
TOOLS

Lewis recommends the right art supplies for the job...

For sketching and breakdowns I use a leadholder with an HB lead. Hold the pencil as far away from the tip as possible for faster, looser lines, choking up on it only for the fine details.

A leadholder sharpener. Gotta have one.

Kneaded erasers can change shape, don't tear up the paper, don't leave behind eraser bits, and they can be used to either completely erase or just lighten up pencil work.

Microns are wonderful for the way they respond to the paper. I usually use an 03 and an 005 for all my rendering and a 1 to fill in larger black areas. Some whiteout is handy – I prefer whiteout pens. Pentouch is fairly transparent while DecoColor is pretty opaque. I like having both options for corrections, highlights, effects and so on.

7 BREAKING BORDERS

Like anything else, breaking borders should only be done to enhance impact and aid the flow of panel to panel storytelling. This page shows a dream-like sequence written by Peter Milligan where the character sees his wife floating above him moments before he dies. There are some rules I follow when breaking borders. First, border breaks should follow the rules of foreground/background/middleground. Used correctly, this can create a sort of 3D movie effect. I wanted the wife in panel three to break borders, but since she's in the middleground I had to have the head in the foreground at the bottom pop out of the panel. Second, objects breaking borders should only spill over into consecutive panels. Here, the character's helmet in panel one leads the eye right to panel two, the wife's hair takes us from panel two down her legs pointing at the soldier at the bottom of panel three, and her left elbow leads to panel four. If you break the border, break a whole lot of it! If it's half-assed, the effect will be weak and it'll look like you simply ran out of room. Be bold!

8 GO WITH THE Z-FLOW

Direct the reader's eye in a Z-pattern across the page, left to right, then down right to left, and left to right again. This page uses quick cut panels to enhance the Z reading pattern.

9 ZOOMING IN AND OUT AGAIN

This page depicts an intimate scene between two characters. I opted to go with a simple grid panel layout and kept the camera position relatively stationary, instead creating visual interest and enhancing the drama by zooming in and out on the action inside the borders.
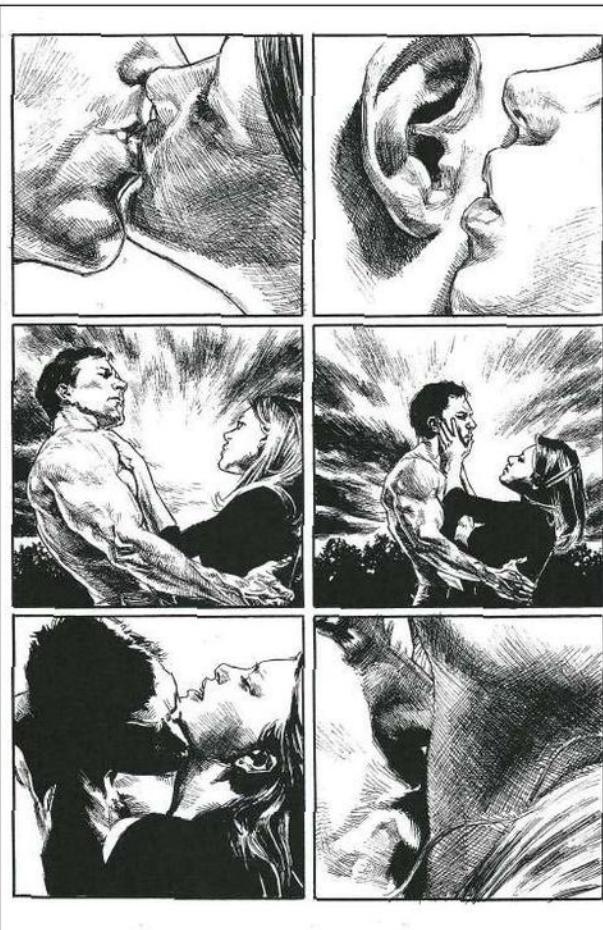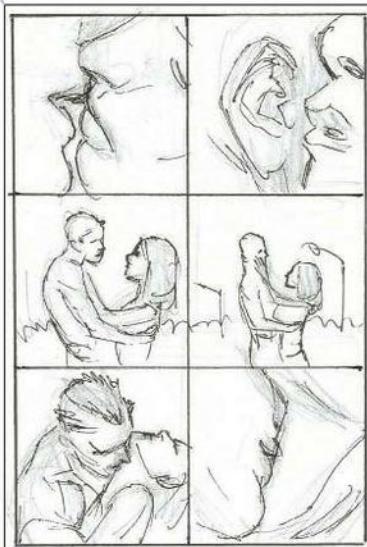
10 ACTING AIDS

A good visual storyteller is adept at conveying character intent and emotions through their acting. Pay attention to body language and facial expressions. Be careful, though. There's a fine balance between being too dramatic and unintentionally comical, and too dull or flat. A full-length mirror set up next to your drawing desk, a hand mirror, and a digital camera are essential aids for capturing the right gesture and expression.

FROM SCRIPT TO ILLUSTRATION BOARD

Lewis takes the writer's draft of a page in Bloodshot and turns it into fully rendered artwork
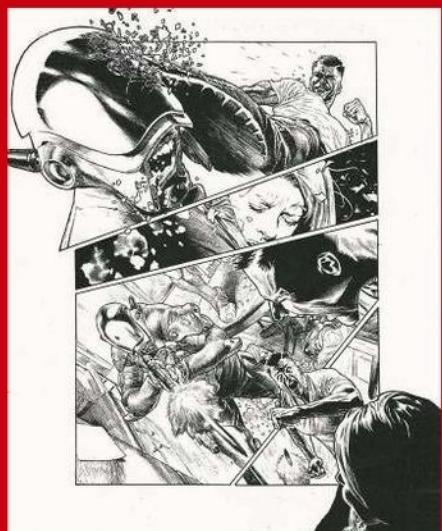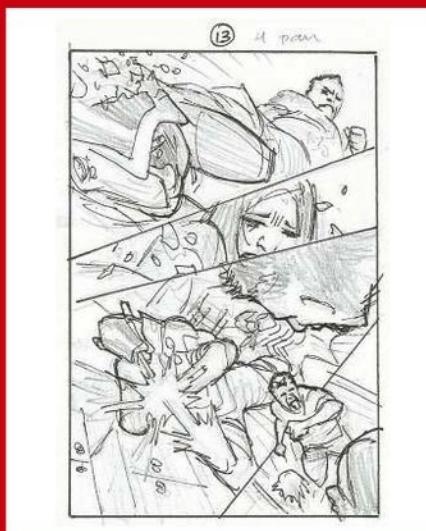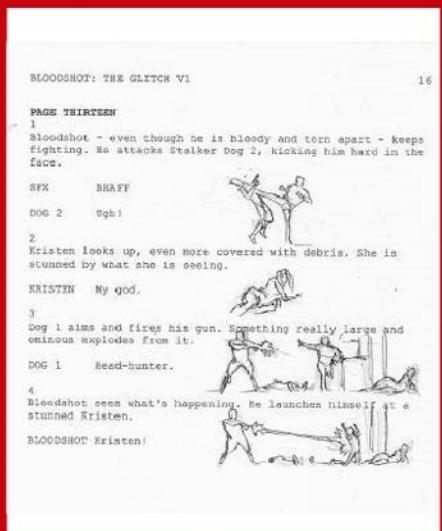
1 Panel by panel sketches

I print out the script and roughly sketch out the action in each scene as plainly as possible right on the page. Nothing fancy. No crazy angles. This is a great way to work out poses, spatial relationships, and the progression of action from panel to panel.

2 Thumbnail layout

Small layouts, or thumbnails, are drawn in sets of four on sheets of 8x11-inch typing paper I've quartered to the proportions of the final drawing board. After studying the sketches I made on the script page, I meditate and visualise the best angles to 'shoot' each scene, floating the camera around the action in my head, and decide how to arrange the panels in the most dynamic and readable way possible.

3 Worked-up illustration

The thumbnail is enlarged and traced onto the illustration board with a lightbox. I decided to have the soldier's head explode through the border in the first panel, to give the kick maximum impact. I also placed the female character in front of the borders on the last panel to keep the foreground/middleground/background consistent, since I had the male character behind her break the border.

11 BATTLE DAMAGE

In an action/adventure comic book, there's bound to be copious amounts of damage done to characters and their environments. Keeping track of the progression of damage from panel to panel and page to page gives added weight to the consequences of the violence taking place. A real sense of danger and, again, believability is created in the storytelling.

> ❝ Progressing the damage done from panel to panel adds weight to the consequences of the violence ❞

12 STATIC VS MOVING CAMERA

Page 15 of Bloodshot has two distinct scenes. The first is full of action (two panels depicting a heavily wounded Bloodshot gunning down a Stalker Dog soldier before finally collapsing). The second scene is relatively quiet. His wife cradles him in her arms. For the action scene, I kept the camera position relatively static to better emphasise the before and after action in this very busy scene. The static camera position makes the between-the-panels action nice and clear. For the second scene, since Bloodshot and his wife are being still, I was free to move the camera around to focus on each of their facial expressions. ➤➤

Workshops

13 CONSISTENCY IN STAGING YOUR SCENE

Much of the action in this issue takes place in a kitchen. It was important that the layout of the kitchen was drawn up prior to choreographing the action for the sake of consistency and therefore believability. The big window door the Stalker Dogs burst through, the table Bloodshot and his wife were sitting at, the refrigerator, the stove, the door, the locations of the characters and so on were all kept consistent throughout.
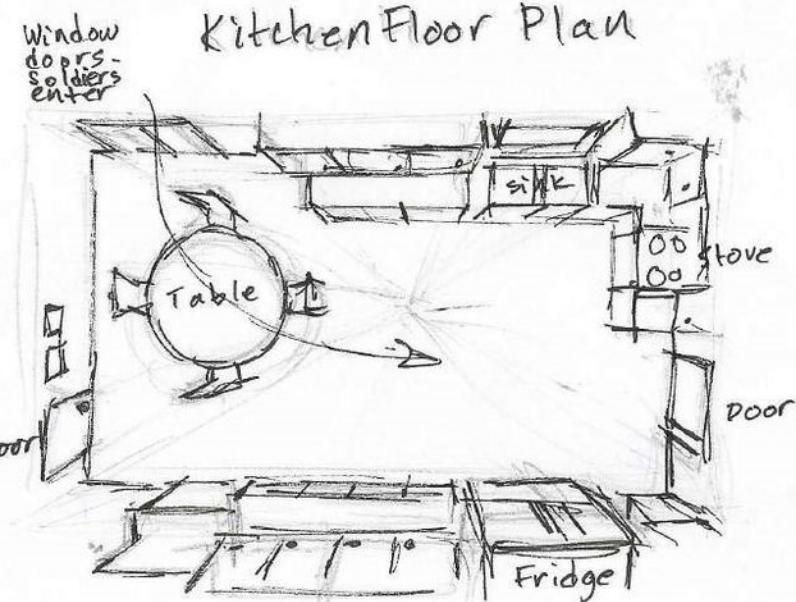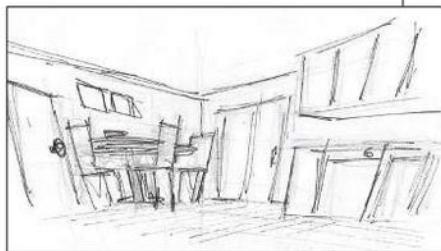
14 VERTICAL VS HORIZONTAL

Vertical panels portray shorter passages in time and tense moments; horizontal ones stretch out for open, relaxed moments. This page uses smaller vertical panels at the top to illustrate a quick, tense exchange between a villainous general and an insubordinate lackey. At the bottom, two big, wide horizontal panels are used to illustrate a relaxed scene of Bloodshot and his wife in a meadow.
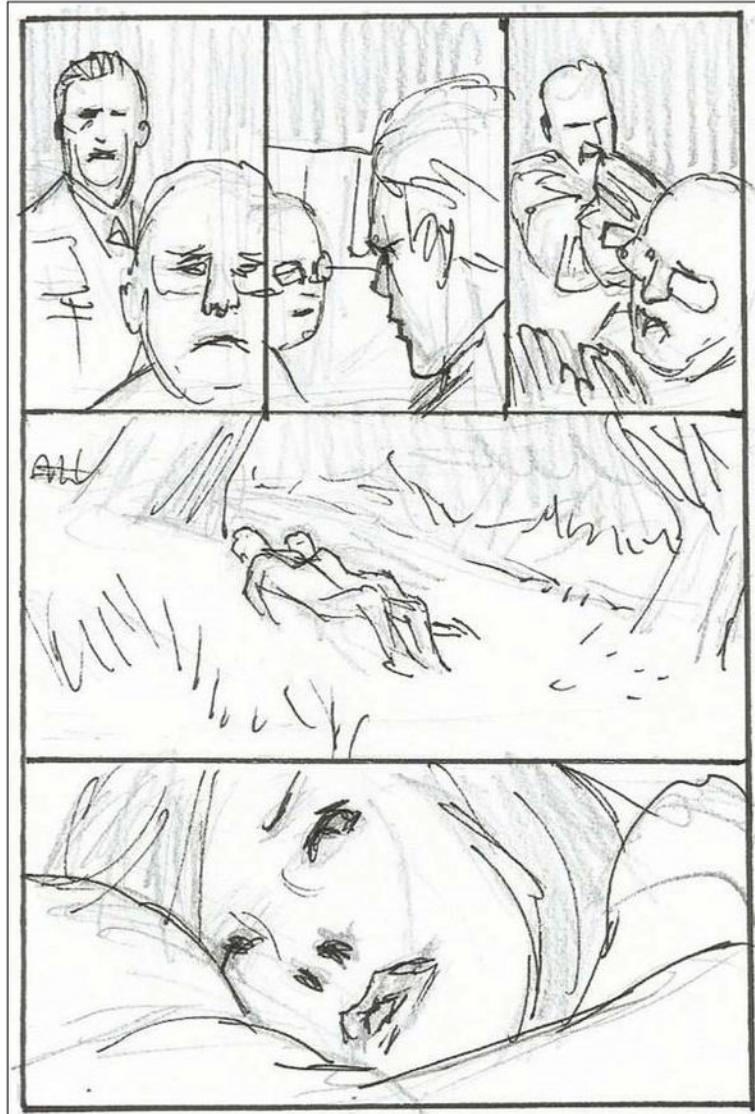
> **Constantly review the layouts to make sure there's not a sameness from page to page**

15 SHAKE THINGS UP

Variety is key to comic book storytelling. Vary panel sizes, shapes, camera angles, use of blacks, compositions and figure size as much as possible within the script's parameters. Constantly step back and review the layouts to make sure there's not a sameness from page to page. Comic book visuals should be dynamic and change throughout the book to reflect the story's tone, atmosphere, locations and action. ●
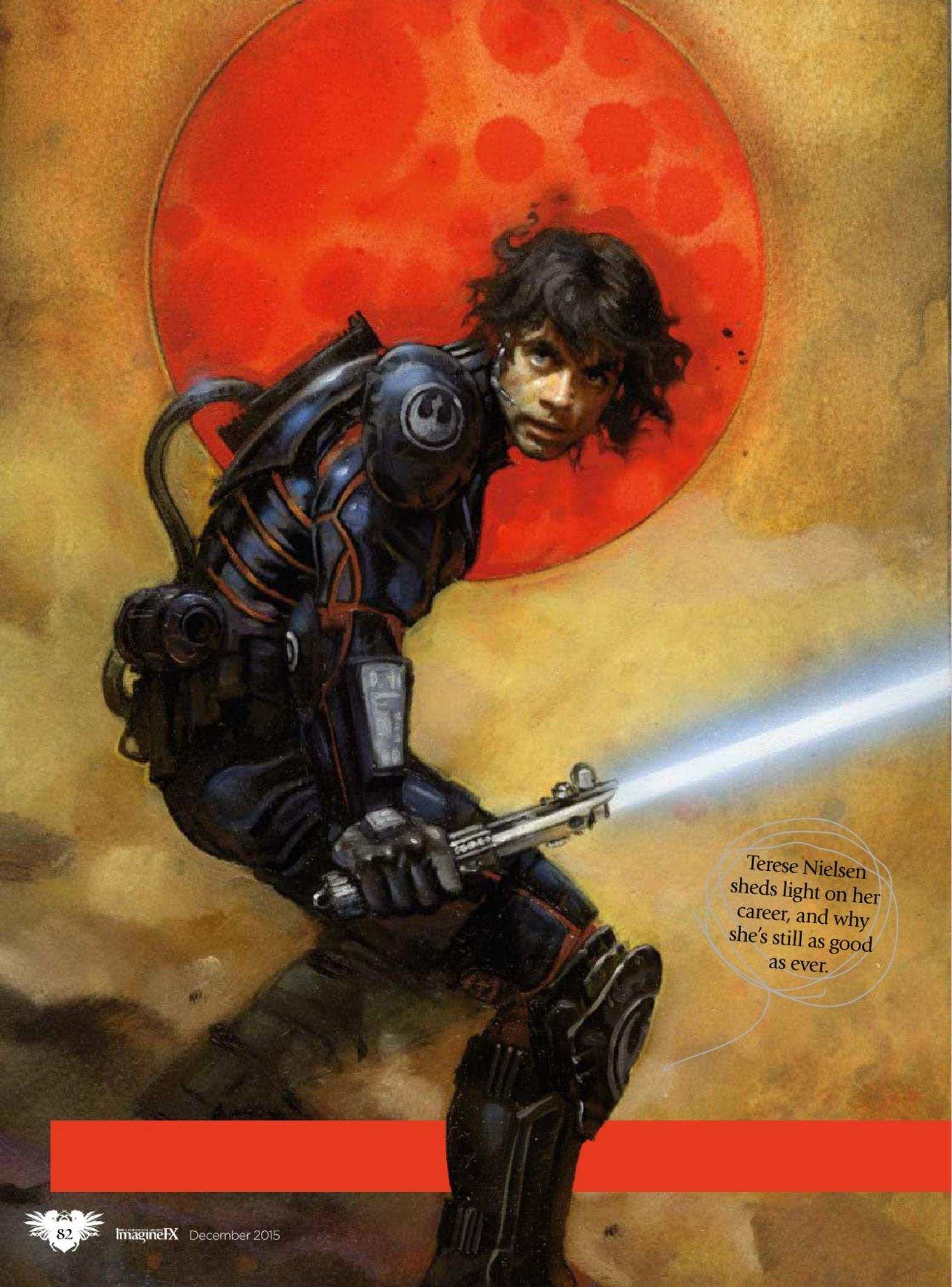
Terese Nielsen sheds light on her career, and why she's still as good as ever.

Photoshop
PAINT HELLBOY CARICATURE ART

Jean-Baptiste Monge shares his thought process for recreating a comic classic, with a younger, cuter version of Mike Mignola's Hellboy

Artist PROFILE
Jean-Baptiste Monge
LOCATION: Canada

Jean-Baptiste is an illustrator and 2D and 3D character designer known for his goblin and fairy artwork. He divides his time between his self-publishing projects and different animation studios.
www.jbmonge.com

RESOURCES
See page 6 now!

A s a traditional illustrator I look on software as a tool – a powerful one that offers countless possibilities in comparison to traditional media. The main advantage is simplicity of use and the option to undo mistakes at any moment without the fear of ruining your illustration. It's simpler than oil, watercolour or acrylic paints, because you can step back. The only problem is knowing when to stop.

Like any medium, there are traps. You can easily lose yourself in useless details and quickly bury your idea. You have much more control over several aspects of painting, including the composition and what your picture is telling you, which are by far the most important points, before dealing with the detail.

In Photoshop, I have reduced the selection of tools I use. My settings are quite simple. Even though I have lots of brushes I usually use five of them and the

Smudge tool, which I prefer to the Mixer Brush tool. I use masks, selections and gradients a lot and, of course, blending modes. I save often and regularly flatten my layers to keep the software running properly.

Recreating Hellboy, I'll approach the colour, light and make a volume render in almost the same way I would do using traditional methods, just quicker. I'll show you how to create an iconic character on a simple background.
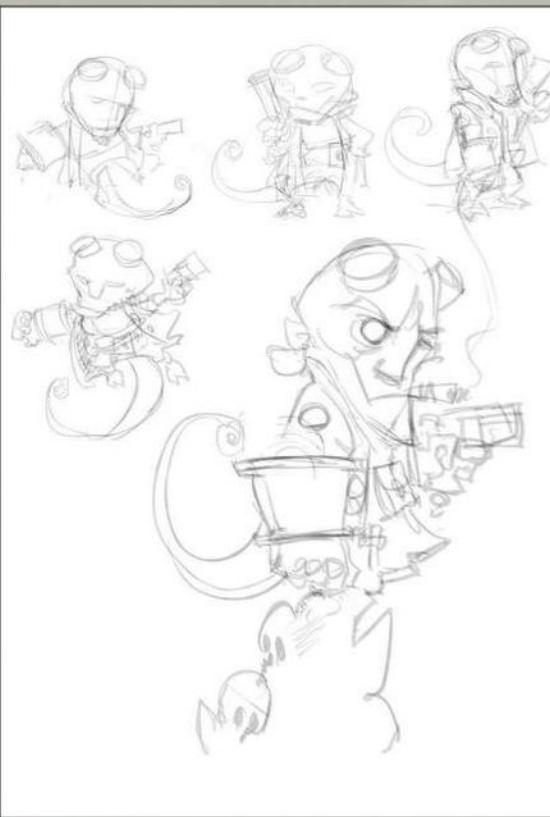
1 Find the idea
Hellboy has a lot of personality. To set the mood, I sketch him in various poses from different angles. I doodle a lot, so I always have my notebook and sheets of paper near me, helping me quickly draw initial ideas for illustrations – digital or traditional. This time, around 10 or so little sketches give me enough to turn around an idea.

2 Composition and cleaning
A good picture tells a story. This is the starting point. Colour, light and atmosphere all help, but the drawing and composition are the base of your structure, so don't neglect them. I clean up the paper sketch, then I scan it at 300dpi. Next, I fix a few imperfections in Photoshop. ➤➤

3 Colour masses

I focus on the character and start blocking in colours by making selections with the Lasso tool. I often fill areas with a gradient, because it quickly gives the idea of volume and diversifies the colour palette. Usually it takes me about an hour to find the right hues. Here things are simpler: Hellboy already has a colour scheme. It's mine to play with.

4 The primer

I paint with a soft textured brush. I use it as I would a primer in traditional painting. It's still rough, but this step helps me to give more volume to the main lines of the face and to seriously think about the light. I start to visualise where I want to go with the colours, lighting and overall mood.

5 The right mood

On a new layer, I paint over him with a blue-purple gradient, softly saturated, with Multiply set to 40 per cent to strengthen the silhouette. I duplicate the layer and change the mode to Overlay at 45 per cent. On a third layer I add a yellow gradient, in Subtract mode, which removes the yellow from my channels and helps create a nocturnal mood.

6 Defining the light

Now my values are darker and I'm feeling the character more. I add detail to the skin and set the angle of the main light, which is top right. I paint an area of reflected light on the skin by following the colour defined in my shadowed areas and lightening its value. In this step I've used the Chalkwet brush a lot, for a gouache texture.

7 Starting to detail

I use different textured brushes on the cloth and gun and work on the ammunition belt and the soft incandescence of the cigar. I start to detail the skulls and choose to stay in blue-purple hues so as not to draw too much attention to them. I often use the Smudge tool, with the tool preset to a brush by Sam Nielson, which makes it simple to mix colours.

8 Adding background

I add a simple background and at the same time flatten most of my layers. I keep working on the character, adding more subtle details. Going online, I find some reference images of leather and metal. The darker the background, the more startling the effect. This is convenient for the reflections on the metal, too.

9 Natural brush work

I use Photoshop as if I was painting with gouache. I like using the pressure on my stylus, barely modifying the opacity, but I vary the flow, to give my brush strokes a more natural feel. Using the Lighten and Soft Light blending modes, I give detail to the metal areas. I've tried a version with full horns, but I'm unconvinced and return to the sawed-off Hellboy.

10 Cleaning up

Time to clean him up. I sharpen the face and gun on a flattened layer using a mask. I add flames on a dark background, shifted with Liquify, then turn on Screen mode to detail his head. So it doesn't seem too regular, I apply a soft textured background, with Multiply at 13 per cent. Above this layer I add a radial gradient to give it some depth.

11 Background interest

Time to look at the background. Similar to when I blocked in the colours at the beginning of my painting process, I trace a few tentacles with the Lasso to add some story. Then I convert to greyscale to check if my values are correct. I keep adding detail to the picture, referring to earlier steps to make sure I don't miss something interesting.

12 Take a step back

At last I pinpoint what was bothering me. By overworking some details, the face has lost its strength and been softened. To correct this, I work on the lines of the nose, the mouth and cheekbones in a snappier way and soften the Sharpen effect. Stepping back like this is necessary to restore the punchiness of the first draft.

13 Warming it up

I boost the silhouette effect and look for the best effect for the skin texture, without falling into the trap of overworking it again. To make the colours vibrate a bit, I add a turquoise-blue layer, with Overlay at four per cent, and above it a dark blue layer in Exclusion mode. It warms up the picture and leaves a soft, smoky film in the background.

14 Final steps

Finally, I check that the dimensions of the picture fit the demands of the client and I return to the background to desaturate the skulls' colour with the Blending Mode Hue. I decide to use some elements from an older version, like the tail and few details of the silhouette that I lost along the way. After one final review, Hellboy is ready. ●

Shortcuts
Flatten Layer
Cmd+Alt+Shift+E (Mac)
Ctrl+Alt+Shift+E (PC)
Add a flattened version of the actual image as a new layer in your document.

PRO SECRETS

Experiment
Take risks in Photoshop, try many ways, modes and hues. That's its great power – and you can still undo anything that doesn't suit you.
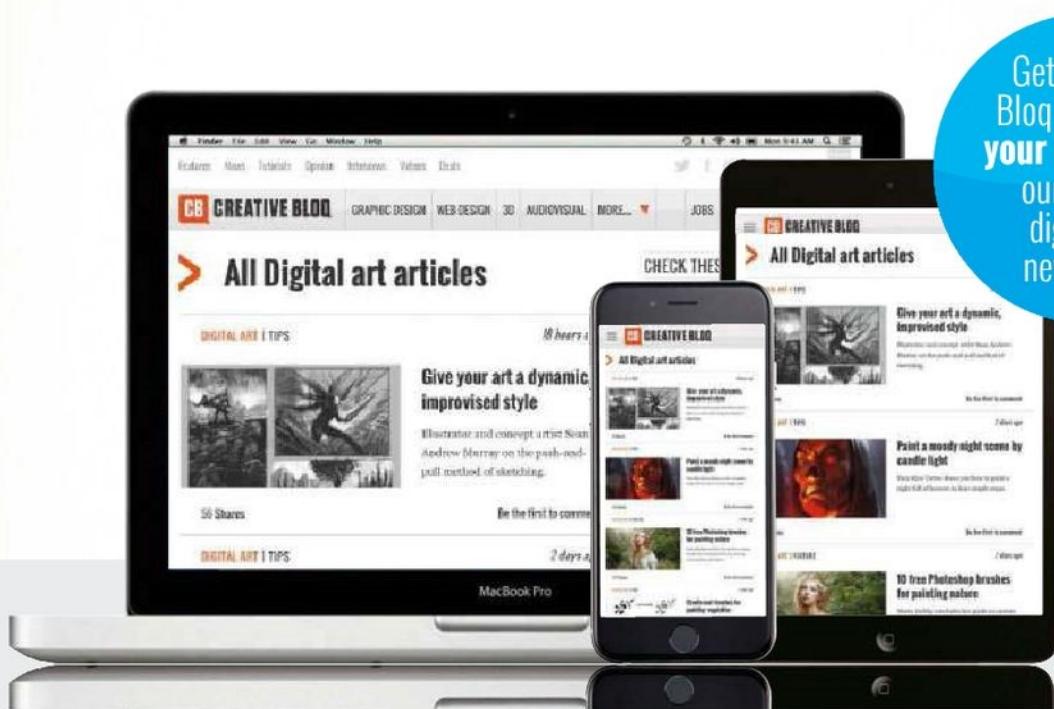
NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
Reviews

Artist's Choice Award
Art resources with a five-star rating receives the ImagineFX Artist's Choice award!

The latest digital art resources are put to the test by the ImagineFX team…

6 PRODUCTS ON TEST
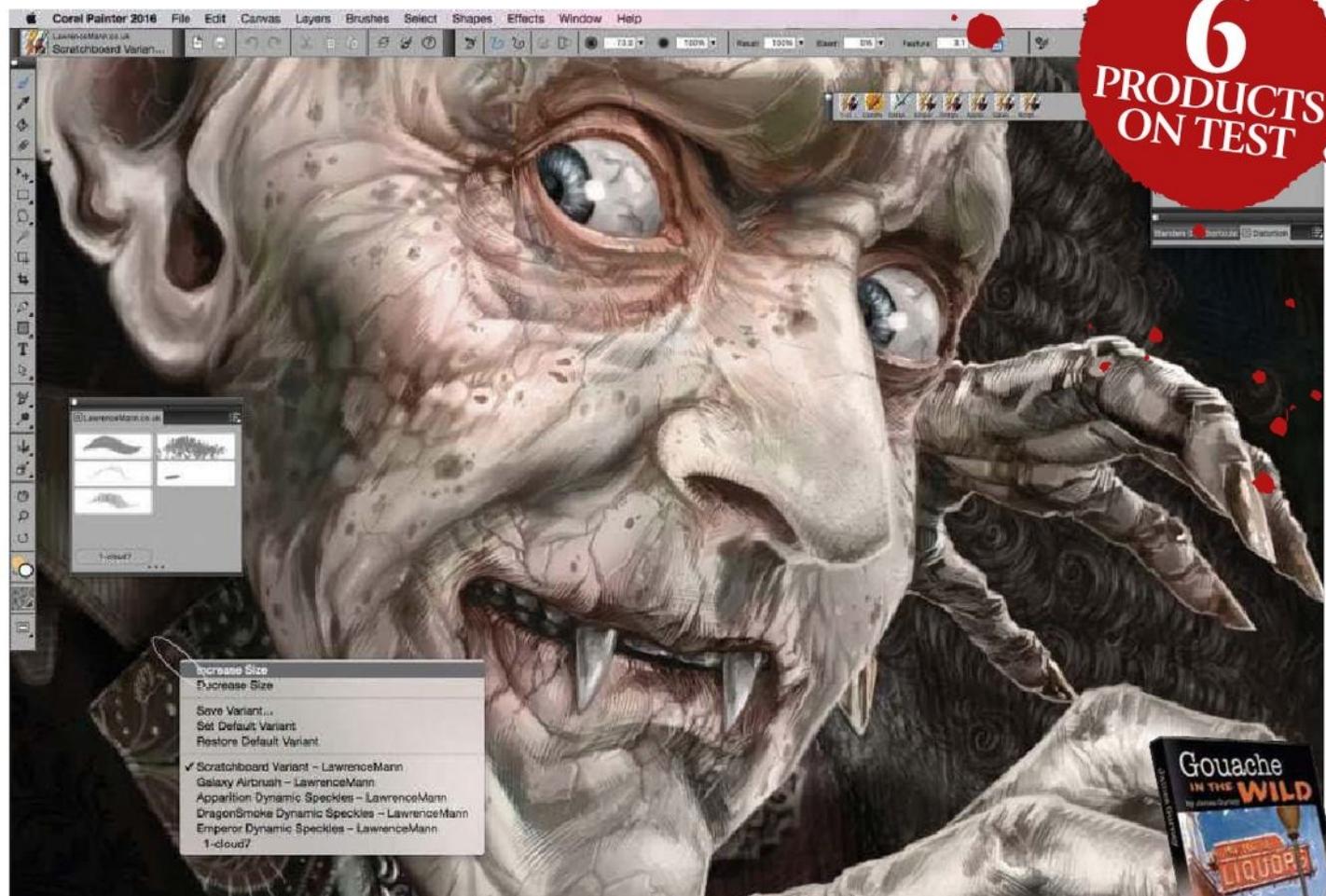
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90 Painter 2016
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Corel's new plugin brings its impressive Particle brush technology to Adobe's Photoshop – but are its limitations too severe?

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Painter and illustrator James Gurney shares some of the skills that help him create paintings on location.

BOOKS

96 New reads
The Art of John Avon: Journeys to Somewhere Else; Resident Evil: Revelations; Sketching from the imagination: Sci-fi.

RATINGS EXPLAINED ✎✎✎✎✎ Magnificent ✎✎✎✎ Great ✎✎✎ Good ✎✎ Poor ✎ Atrocious
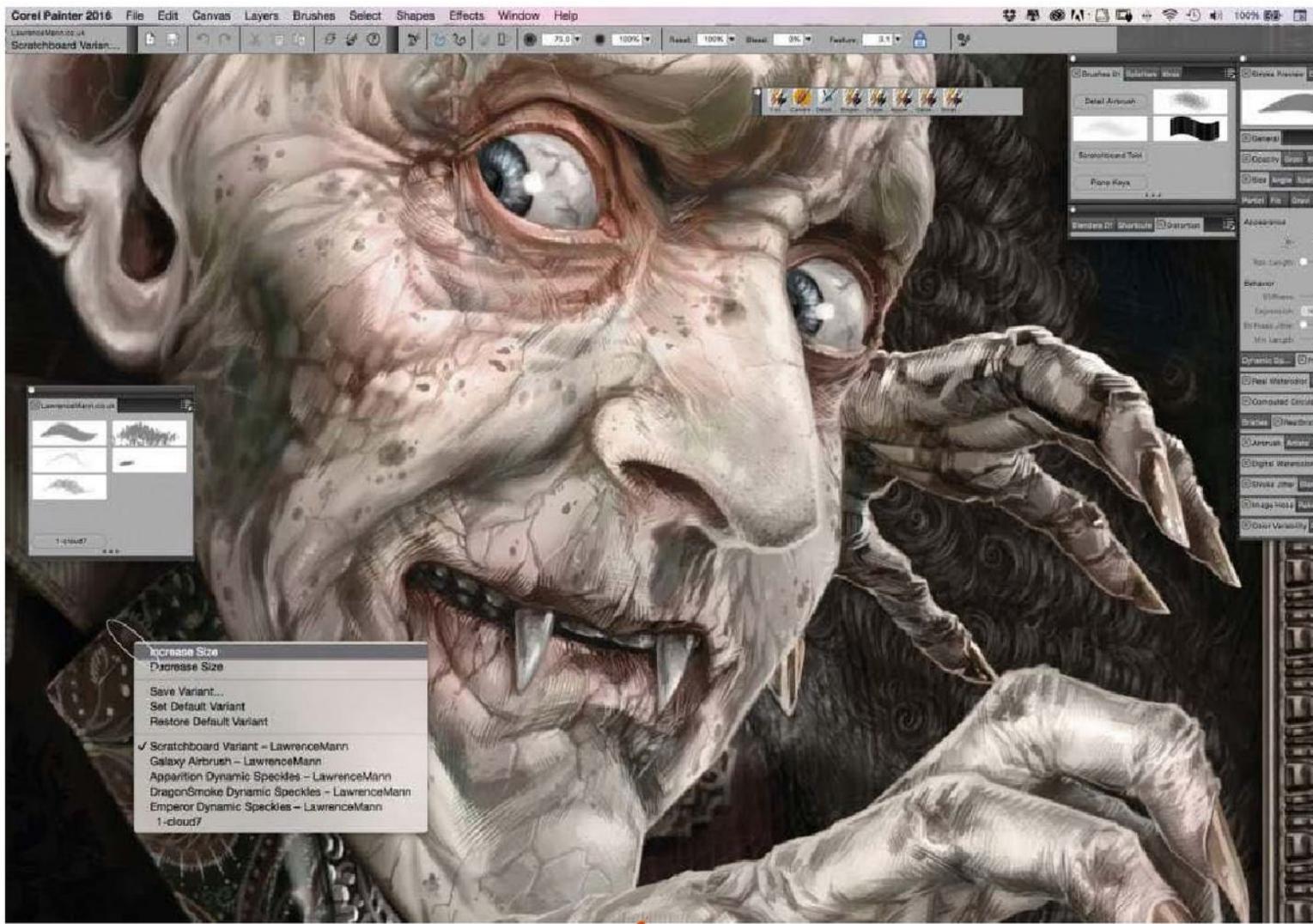
Painter 2016

MAC & PC

FRESH PAINT We investigate the new features Corel has introduced to see if this already capable painting software is worth investing in

Price £315 (full version); £159 (upgrade)   **Company** Corel   **Web** www.painterartist.com

Painter has been around for a long time, with a loyal fanbase and a mature, fully packed feature set. This means it already does pretty much everything that the majority of digital artists need it to, from excellent traditional brush reproduction and simulation, to beautifully rendered paper texture and a lot more. That makes it harder for the developers to find new tools and features – but Corel has managed to do this with some success for the 2016 edition.

The biggest new feature in 2016 is Dynamic Speckles, which is truly a fantastic tool, especially for those artists looking to add a touch of natural chaos to a piece, or want to add variety to a repetitive area, such as foliage, hair or detail in rock.

At initial glance, the new brushes look and feel a bit like a preset 2D particles system. But when you dig deeper into the brush settings you have a lot of control over every aspect, from colour variation to jitter, size, opacity and most elements of a brush that need fine tuning.

What's nice is that the brushes are quick to define, enabling you to work at a creative pace, rather than being held back by button pushing and menu surfing. The rendered results are lovely: variations look natural, without the forced pattern look you might expect.

The above was painted by Lawrence Mann (see Artist Interview on the right, for more), who was named a Corel Master Painter 2015.

If there's one new feature that feels slightly out of place however, it's the introduction of the Audio Expression tool. In essence, this means you can load in an audio file and Painter will then use the waveforms to control attributes of your stroke. While having some music on while painting is favoured by many, the transition from background to canvas doesn't feel altogether natural. Although the strokes are unmistakably varied, it's hard to see how the music is controlling the results.

Modern software for artists needs to be versatile, powerful and able to fit into a user's workflow, as seamlessly as possible. Previous versions of Painter
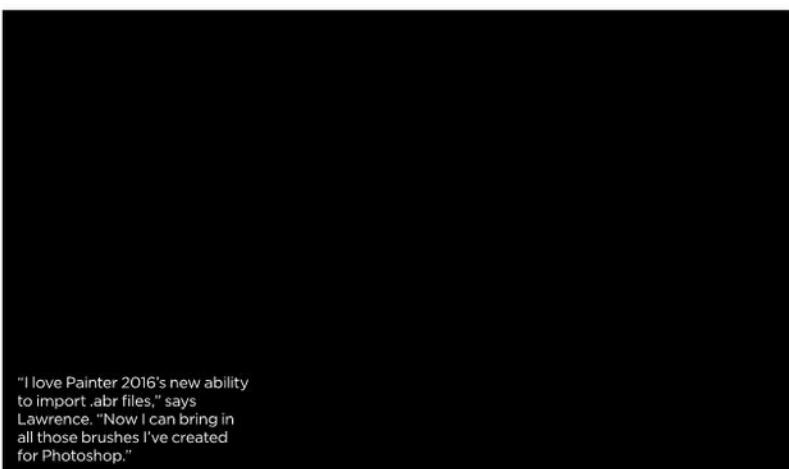
"I love Painter 2016's new ability to import .abr files," says Lawrence. "Now I can bring in all those brushes I've created for Photoshop."

"Painter isn't a substitute for Photoshop," says Lawrence. "Instead, think of them working together symbiotically to create great art."

Lawrence argues all artists have a responsibility to get involved with the development of software and hardware that they use.

66 Dynamic Speckles is truly a fantastic tool, especially for those artists looking to add a touch of natural chaos 99

have been pretty good at giving you the choice of where to dock palettes and GUI elements, and this new release adds to this with a useful new custom toolbox system. While not breaking any real new ground, what Painter does allow for is palettes of mixed items. So if you're a particularly focused artist who tends to only use a small handful of tools, you could gather them into one palette, keeping your workspace clear.

2016 is a solid release for Painter that brings a number of new features to the artist. Yet it's the more subtle enhancements that make it a worthwhile purchase. The custom toolbox is great and, along with the new Photoshop brush import option, does help to make an artist's life easier.

While the other new features are a mixed bag, none of them detract from a great painting program, and some help it stand out. ●

ARTIST INTERVIEW
LAWRENCE MANN
The illustrator and artist reveals his painting – and Painter – setup

Can you tell us your background as an artist and Painter user?
I've been using Painter for the past few years. I started off in Photoshop back in the early 90s with a very small beige drawing tablet and while I still use Photoshop and my trusty Wacom every day, the technology has come a long way. I chose to explore Painter because it was a dedicated painting package with hundreds of unique brushes.

What's your favourite feature in Painter 2016?
The introduction of the Dynamic Speckles Brushes. These were radically different to what had come before and immensely helpful to my fantasy art. I couldn't wish for a better set of brushes.

Can you tell us a little about your workflow?
I'm a fully digital artist these days. I might do an initial thumbnail sketch on a notepad while on Skype with a client, but that's really about it. Everything else is done digitally with my Wacom Cintiq 27QHD Touch – an absolutely wonderful tablet that I simply couldn't live without.

What's so special about the combination of your chosen hardware and software?
I could never go back to another tablet or monitor, especially as Painter has so many functions that demand the sensitivity and accuracy of the Wacom.

What's the key to successful art?
For me, an image is about telling a story. It's one of the reasons I love painting book covers. Adding in those details embellishes the story beyond the obvious or enriches the character, and help gain potential readers. It's a great way to add extra value for my clients and bring a cover to life. I also have a background in marketing, so I know the importance of making your audience turn the cover!

Lawrence is one of only 10 artists world-wide to be awarded the title of Corel Master Painter 2015.

www.lawrencemann.co.uk

DETAILS
Features
■ Speckle Dynamics brush
■ Custom toolboxes
■ Audio Expression
■ Import Photoshop .abr brushes
■ Improved blending tools

System Requirements
PC: Windows 10, 8.1 or 7, Pentium 4, Athlon 64 or Opteron CPU, 2GB RAM, 750MB hard disk space
Mac: OS X 10.9 or later, Core 2 Duo CPU, 2GB RAM, 540MB hard disk space

Rating
👍👍👍👍
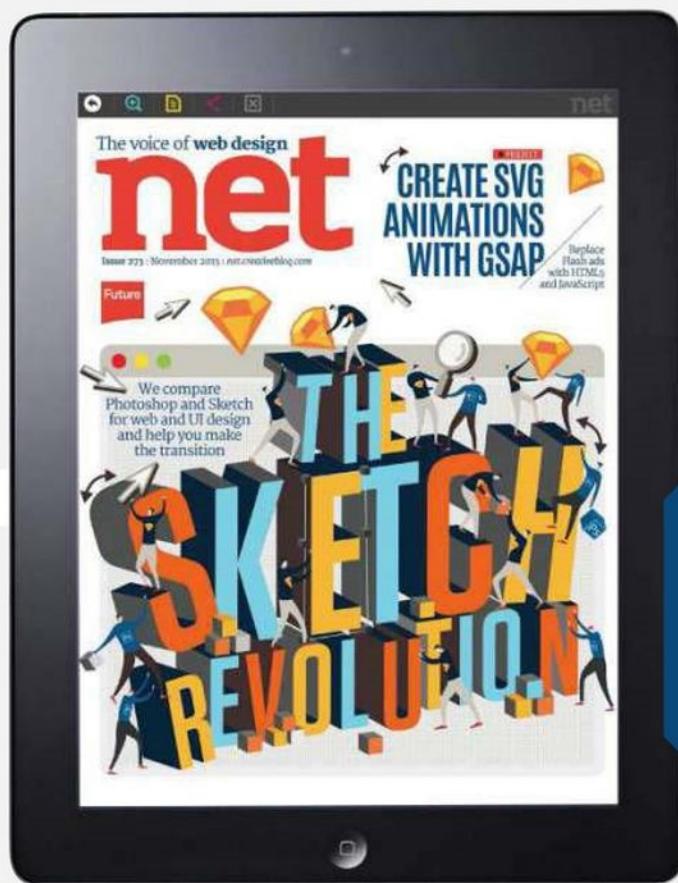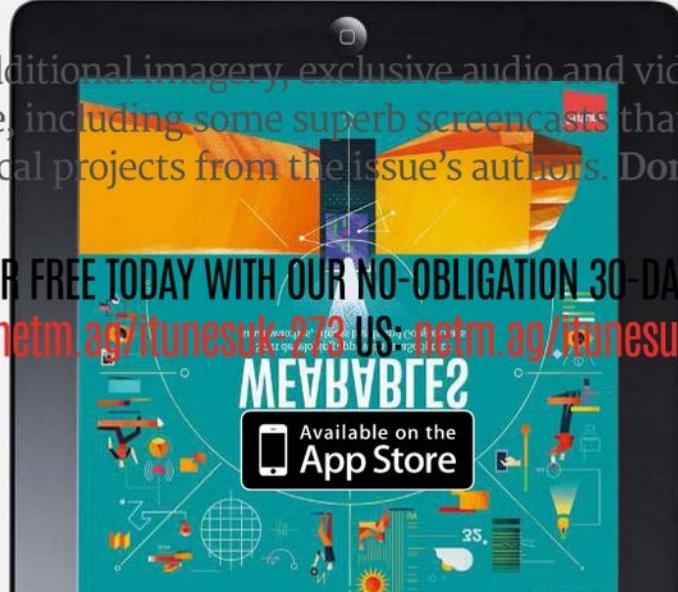
The impressive realism of ParticleShop's effect brushes means you can add dust, shine and general chaos to your scenes.
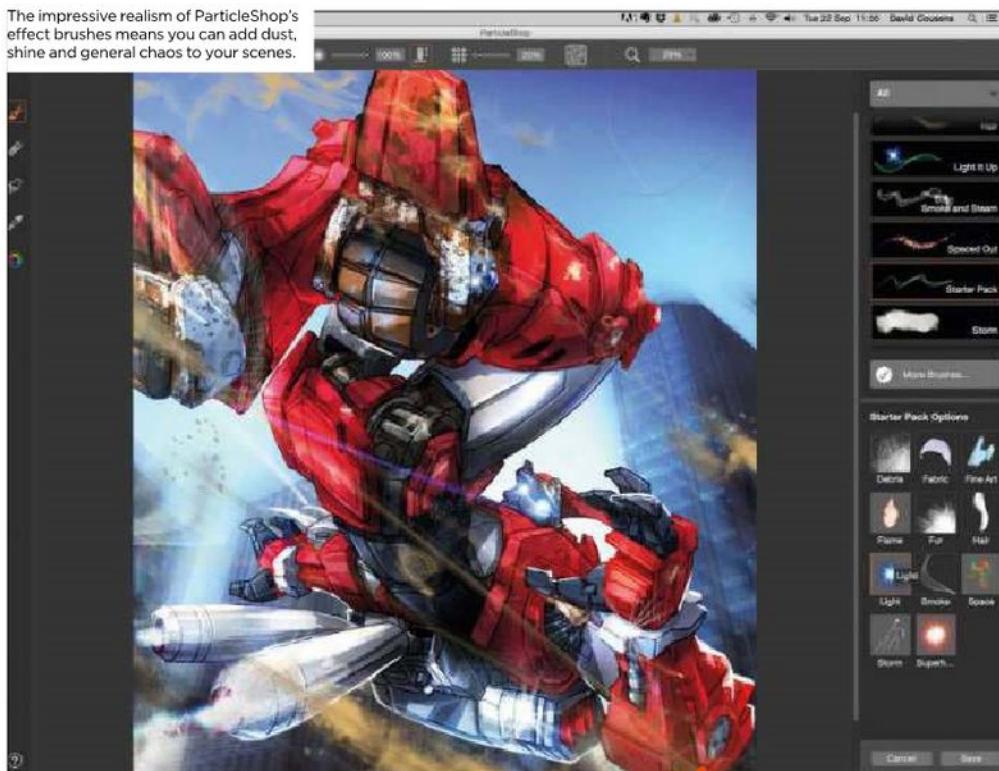
Dramatic-looking backgrounds, such as nebulas and the aurora borealis, can be quickly rustled up with ParticleShop's brushes.

Once you install the plug-in, it won't take long to enhance your landscape paintings by adding sci-fi elements – such as this interdimensional rift.

ParticleShop

MAC & PC

PARTICLE POWER! Corel's new plug-in brings its impressive Particle brush technology to Photoshop. But are its limitations too severe?

Price £40; £25 for additional brush packs (15 brushes per pack) **Company** Corel **Web** www.painterartist.com/ParticleShop

ParticleShop is a promising program, with a lot of potential. It's an official plug-in for Photoshop made by Corel (also compatible with Adobe Lightroom, Corel PHOTO-PAINT and PaintShop Pro) that offers a starter range of 11 brushes powered by Painter's Particle brush technology, making them technically more impressive than anything supplied by Adobe. Each brush in the starter pack gives an example of the 11 additional brush packs (including flame, light, smoke, hair, space and debris) available for purchase.

Running ParticleShop launches the program in its own window rather than inside Photoshop. But the user interface feels very similar and it'll only take you a few moments to acclimatise to the controls. The brushes are described as photorealistic, which is indulging in hyperbole a touch, but they are genuinely impressive and considerably more advanced than your usual Photoshop custom brushes. The aurora borealis effect brush will have you painting the Northern lights in minutes. A lot of the light effect

brushes are lovely, and will enhance photographs and illustrations to give them a fantastical feel. However, despite being gorgeous brushes, they do have some unfortunate limitations that detract from the overall product.

Most disappointingly, there's no Layer functionality within ParticleShop, so you'll need to make a copy of your original photo or painting because

66 The aurora borealis brush will have you painting the Northern lights in minutes 99

you'll be painting directly on to it! Alternatively, you could make a new layer on top of the image in Photoshop before running the plug-in, but you'll be painting effects on to a transparent layer with no original layer underneath to use as a reference point. When the file is back in Photoshop, you could transform the effects into place, but this seems counter-productive.

DETAILS

Features
■ Integrates with Painter, Photoshop, Lightroom and Elements
■ Download and install brush packs from within the app
■ 11 brush themes include Debris, Fabric and Flame
■ Particle brushes more powerful than Photoshop's native brushes
■ Brushes require no customisation

System Requirements
PC: Windows 7 or later, Pentium 4, Athlon 64 or Opteron CPU, 2GB RAM, 650MB hard drive space, 1,024x768 display
Mac: OS X 10.9 or later, Pentium 4, Athlon 64 or Opteron CPU, 2GB RAM, 650MB hard drive space, 1,024x768 display

Rating

ParticleShop's brushes are effect brushes, intended to supplement and enhance an image rather than create one from scratch. If you think about print adverts where athletes are hurling flaming basketballs while leaving energy trails, then this is the sort of look ParticleShop would not only make easy, but excel at. Futuristic landscape concepts would also be augmented well with ParticleShop.

So do we recommend you purchase ParticleShop? Sadly, not yet. With further development, ParticleShop could find itself in the must buy category. But for that it would need the addition of layer support, some stabilisation so the plug-in doesn't cause Photoshop to crash when other apps are running simultaneously (we had to turn off Spotify to get ParticleShop to load correctly) and a more reasonable pricing structure (currently if you want the entire set of ParticleShop brushes you'd be looking at paying over £300). But right now, despite its numerous excellent brushes on offer, ParticleShop needs more versatility and stability to earn its current price tag. ●

As he paints a neon shop sign, James uses his experience to get a solid result despite the ever-changing light.

Other media such as coloured pencils combine well with gouache, as James captures the detail in this gas station scene.
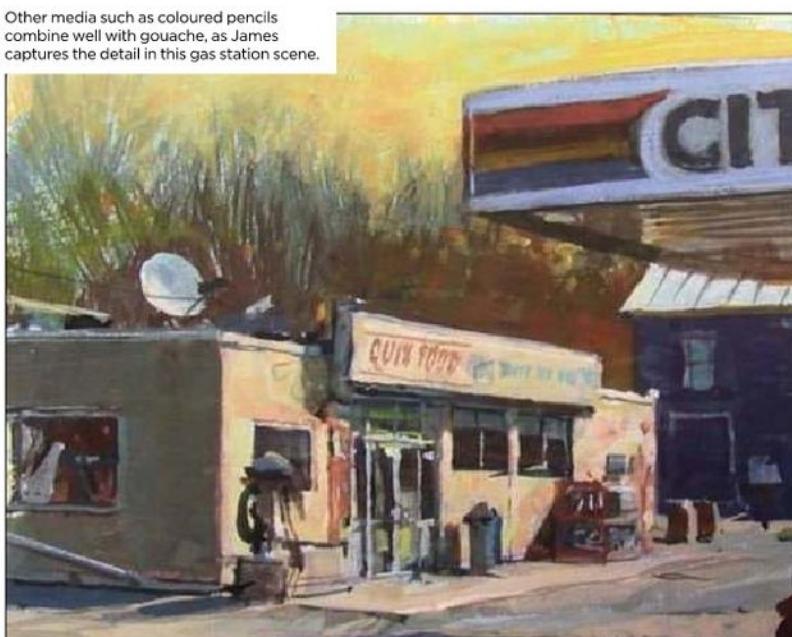
This rural scene needs a lot of preparation, but this frees up James' limited time at sunset to capture important detail.

ImagineFX ARTIST'S CHOICE

Gouache IN THE WILD by James Gurney
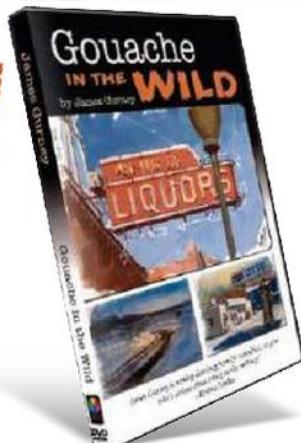
Gouache In The Wild

MASTER AT WORK Painter and illustrator James Gurney shares some of the skills that help him create brilliant paintings on location

Publisher Gurney Studios **Price** $25 (DVD), $15 (download) **Web** www.jamesgurney.com

James Gurney is famed for paintings that show either imaginary or, in the case of his dinosaur pictures, long-since-vanished phenomena. This second video from his In The Wild series (following Watercolour In The Wild, reviewed in issue 115) showcases one of the key techniques James employs to make the fantastic appear so real in his work. Put simply, he takes every opportunity he can to paint outdoors, observing and recording the world around him.

James shows here why gouache is his preferred medium for certain situations and locations. Its facility for laying down flat colour, for example, makes it a natural choice for rendering man-made objects like the neon sign he finds during one visit. The video alternates between teaching sessions that discuss the basics such as materials and core methods, and on-location films showing James tackling a variety of different subjects.

Everything is presented in a relaxed manner and with the high production values it makes the video a delight to watch. It's so pleasing on the eyes and ears you don't realise how much you're learning, which goes far beyond the technicalities of gouache.

As he paints the neon sign, for example, James talks about the difference in colour temperature between areas in sunlight and areas in shadow, and how he adapts the hues to communicate it. This study reflects a broader theme in the video of how to deal with light that's changing faster than you can paint. For the fixed sign, James comes back the next day to finish the picture. In a rural location, he anticipates how the scene will broadly look after the sun has set, so that he can focus on important details when the relevant moment arrives.

If you're keen to raise your own work to a higher standard, this hour-and-a-quarter with a master of the craft will set you on the right track.

ImagineFX SAMPLE VIDEO

DETAILS

Topics covered
- What is gouache?
- Colour choices
- Basic painting methods
- Acrylic gouache
- Painting man-made objects
- Colour temperature
- Painting changing light

Length
72 minutes

Rating

ARTIST PROFILE

JAMES GURNEY

James specialises in painting realistic images of scenes that can't be photographed, from dinosaurs to ancient civilisations. He's also a plein air painter and sketcher, believing that making studies from observation fuels his imagination. James taught himself to draw by reading books about Norman Rockwell and Howard Pyle. He received a degree in anthropology at the University of California, but chose a career in art. James has written the instruction books Imaginative Realism, and Color and Light.

www.gurneyjourney.blogspot.com

The Art of John Avon: Journeys to Somewhere Else

PAINTING PILGRIMAGE If you want your art adventure to be long one, then study the footsteps of this fantasy art giant...

Authors Guy Coulson & John Avon **Publisher** John Avon Art Ltd **Price** £40 **Web** www.johnavonart.com **Available** Now

There are countless things you can learn from studying an artist's body of work, especially one whose career spans 30 years. In that time a commercial artist needs to remain relevant or perish, while simultaneously holding on to something that defines them as unique among their peers.

Doing this (and doing it well) is something John Avon knows a lot about. Thanks to Journeys to Somewhere Else he now reveals his personal passage with us – warts, screaming leaves, floating cities and all.

Back in June 2014 the Kickstarter campaign to make this book was launched and surpassed its goal in a short space of time, such is the appreciation for the artist's work. Indeed, it's fairly easy to become a fan of John's art. You can begin in the late 80s and early 90s with iconic book cover designs like those for Stephen

This artwork appears as a gatefold in the book. John tried hard to make all five landscapes work as a whole.

King's Dark Towers series, where his mastery of combining acrylic and airbrush blend atmospheric lighting with solid, believable characters inhabiting a fantastical landscape.

Or you can start with his continuing relationship with Magic: The Gathering which began in 1996, where the themes of balance that run throughout his career are still in attendance. By the time we get halfway through the book – signifying the introduction of pixels into the Avon equation – this balancing act is still at play, whether it's light and dark, dominant complementary hues, or grand structures that dwarf intrepid explorers within the composition.

That's not to say that the bedrock of John's work is focused entirely on contrasts. His ability to imbue narrative within a sparse scene is breathtaking. Even his simple landscape paintings always seem to have some cue that invites exploration and suggests the beginning of a narrative.

John reveals that he felt the pressure of creating artwork for Stephen King's The Dark Tower series.

So there's a lot here that any aspiring artist or illustrator can learn from – the majority of which is imparted through captions that accompany each painting. In a single paragraph a strong personal connection to John's process or thinking at the time is established. The result is you can navigate John's career with him as a guide. It's an opportunity not to be missed.

RATING ✎✎✎✎

Resident Evil Revelations: Official Complete Works

DESIGN REVELATIONS Genetic modification and creature experimentation go under the microscope...

Editor Noriomi Ito   **Publisher** Titan Books   **Price** £20   **Web** www.titanbooks.com   **Available** Now

We've always been big fans of Capcom's fan service. From marketing paraphernalia and ephemera, to collectables like this art of book, the beloved Japanese games developer of the Resident Evil series always seems to deliver high-quality, insightful publications.

Readers are treated to the full production process that falls to the art team: from character concept art, 3D

Artwork from a suitably foreboding location from the game, showing how light is cleverly used to add tension.

renders for marketing material, environment paintings and even logo design for patches and costumes.

Almost all of the pages have comments from the featured creator of the work. These are refreshingly humble in many cases: often the artist will poke fun at themselves for overstepping the mark, especially

when handling new designs for the female characters. And no Resident Evil game would be complete without a plethora of genetically altered beasties, so if you're a fan of great creature design then this book definitely caters for you.

RATING ✍✍✍

Sketching from the imagination: Sci-fi

IMAGINE THIS Discover if this themed collection of sketches and concepts from traditional and digital artists is worth dipping into...

Editor Marisa Lewis   **Publisher** 3DTotal Publishing   **Price** £18   **Web** www.3dtotalpublishing.com   **Available** Now

Weighing in at a healthy 300-plus pages, compiling scans from 50 pro artists' sketchbooks, offset by personal and technical insights ranging from sketchbook theory through to preferred material types, this book is packed.

Through our own Sketchbooks pages you'll recognise several of the artists, and via our features you'll already be informed on the virtues of maintaining a sketchbook, and herein lies a few of our niggles...

Nikolay Georgiev, in keeping with the book's sci-fi theme, displays his collection of mech sketches.

After the first ten or so artists explain why it's important to sketch, or what they get from the process, the point has been made well and truly, leaving the reader wanting more explanation about the featured sketches – which unfortunately is often sidelined to short captions.

Sure, the layout and smaller format feels practical, but sometimes it results in things feeling too cramped, leaving

us wanting a larger page size. The alphabetical structure (and navigation) seems unnecessary; breaking from it would equate to a less-regimented approach and help vary the book's pacing, which often feels repetitive. Yet we're willing to overlook these points considering the great value for money on offer here.

RATING ✍✍✍

NO.1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS ImagineFX
PRESENTS

FANTASY
illustrator

Michael Manomivibul

LOCATION: US
WEB: www.mikemanoart.com
EMAIL: mike@mikemanoart.com
MEDIA: Sumi-e ink on paper, Photoshop

Born in Boston, Massachusetts but raised in Bangkok, Thailand, Michael now works freelance in Oakland, California. "I'm influenced equally by both illustration and comics, some of the most important being Mike Mignola's work as well as the work of Greg Ruth and Sergio Toppi. I also look at a lot of turn of the century photography," he says.

Atmosphere and emotional tone are very important to him as a visual storyteller, and he loves designing with light. "I use sumi-e ink as my primary medium. The immediate yet delicate nature of ink is so much fun to explore – an endless well of possibilities contained in just one small bottle."

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Michael's masterful use of ink complements his desire to paint engaging narratives. His skill in lighting is evident, and results in work that pulls the viewer into the scene. Perfect for book covers."
Cliff Hope,
Operations Editor

1 THE HUNTER'S WIFE
Sumi ink and Photoshop, 15x20in
"A piece created to evoke a classic Brothers Grimm fairy tale or piece of folklore, but based on nothing but a dream of rage."

2 TUCKITOR'S LAST SWIM
Sumi ink, Photoshop color, 15x20in
"Created for Tor.com, the piece is the cover to the short story Tuckitor's Last Swim, about a family of whalers who haven't seen a whale in a very long time. The story was written by Edith Cohn."

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

🇺🇸 **Alessandra Pisano**
LOCATION: US
WEB: www.alesspisano.com
EMAIL: alesspisano@yahoo.com
MEDIA: Oils, liquid acrylics, egg tempera

Alessandra has loved art since she was a little girl when she would spend her time drawing mermaids and unicorns. Many years later and not much has changed!

"I really only work traditionally. I just really like having a physical painting when all is said in done, one that can be put in a fantasy frame and be touched. People can get up close and see all my brush strokes."

Alessandra studied illustration at the University of Hartford, Conneticut and has been working professionally for the past five years. "When I'm not painting I enjoy belly dancing, the odd video game, or playing with my fur babies!"

IMAGINEFX CRIT

"Alessandra's art manages to transport the viewer into stories full of intrigue. I really want to know more about the giant horned lion, and who will next benefit from Marie Leveau's love potions."
Alice Pattillo,
Staff Writer

1 SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS
Oil on MDF board, 16x27in
"I mean, who doesn't want a giant fluffy potentially vicious fur baby to hang out with all day and nap on?"

2 MARIE LEVEAU
Oil on MDF board, 16x22in
"Marie Leveau is New Orleans' most famous voodoo queen. She was known for her 100 per cent success rate with love potions, as well as many other things. People would come from all over to seek her out for help. I've been fascinated with New Orleans and all its culture and history – and particularly the voodoo queens – which is why I felt compelled to paint her."

3 THE WATER DANCER
Oil on MDF board, 30x40 in
"I tend to paint a lot of belly dancers because along with being an illustrator I also belly dance. It's something that inspires me and I like incorporating it in my work. When I can add some magic elements to the dancers – well, then you have the best of both worlds!"

Email your submissions to fxpose@imaginefx.com

HEY YOU!
Are you a part of a regular art class or group? Email us at mail@imaginefx.com if you want to feature here!

DARE2DRAW

Leaping into superhero central, NYC, we catch up with CHARLES D CHENET to talk about his revolutionary comic book drawing group inspired by the Will Eisner Studio

Charles D Chenet started Dare2Draw five years ago, following his resignation from the US Air Force. He put everything on the line, including his pension, to start something he believed in and he wished had been available to him: an affordable mentoring process for comic artists.

Charles began by building a studio in Harlem, New York. "I wanted to use a proven model of hard work and commitment, like the classic apprenticeship studios along the lines of the Will Eisner Studio," he says. "Technology continues to make it easier for people to produce their own content and put it out there, which has created a platform for a lot of voices but very few choruses. The only unified voice seems to be coming from large corporations, making it even harder for independent talent to be recognised and discovered."

Since Charles saw no union or real representation for artists, he felt companies were pitching artists against each other – creating a competitive and unhealthy space. "There's a perpetual treadmill for any working artist, with a line behind them of freshly graduated art students, trying to get the same jobs." So Charles created a proving ground for artists where professionals can be easily reached. The pro artists can give back to their community while newcomers gain invaluable contacts and tips.

Steve Rude "the Dude" shares some tips, as he does an oil painting demo, during an event held at the Art Students League of New York.

"Art students and aspiring cartoonists can get together, learn something and get some cool, new art supplies from our sponsors," says Charles. His five-year journey, to boldly go where no cartoonist has gone before, has been for him, "a glorious trek… bringing the events from bars and convention rooms to different art organisations. We're currently producing a TV show, seeing amazing talent with some truly awesome mentoring artists sharing tips and stories of their own journeys – exciting times!"

Charles is the founder of Dare2Draw, a non-profit mentoring platform for all artists. He still serves in the Air Force Reserves. www.dare2draw.org

The Quick Draw countdown heralds the time for artists to add their final touches and colour.
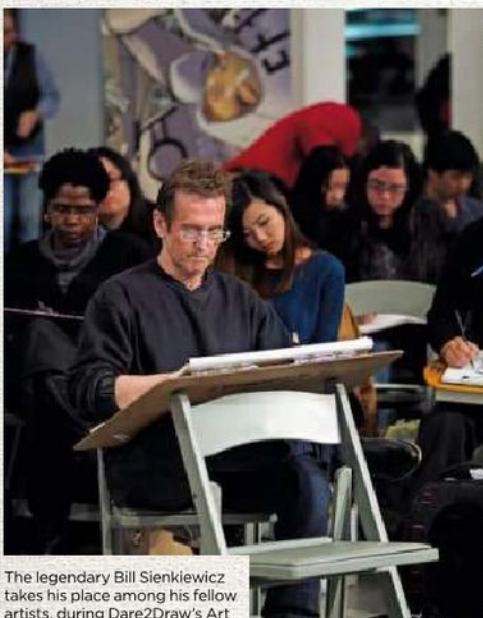
The legendary Bill Sienkiewicz takes his place among his fellow artists, during Dare2Draw's Art Directors Club session.
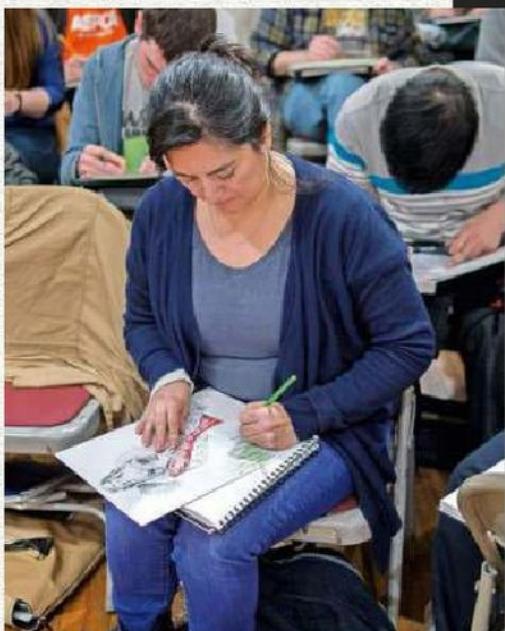
Dare2Draw wants to fuel artists' passions and help them challenge themselves, to get out of their comfort zones and improve, in a fun, engaging and nurturing environment.

Drawing from the models at the Dare2Draw evening event held at Brooklyn Brewery. Phil Jimenez was the star guest.

QUICK ON THE DRAW

Dare2Draw's Quick Draw contest regularly results in eye-catching art

Ed Reynolds delivered the goods for his challenge title of Sexy Vampire!

It Came From the Deep led Andrew Drilon to create a sketch that messes with the head.

Lynn Yoshii followed her challenge to the letter: Use the Model and Add a Underwater Twist.

The brief was to Draw Yourself as a Clown – so Russ Braun did just that!
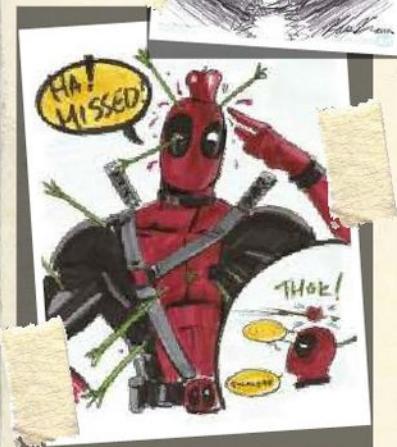
Lynn Yoshii has fun with her open-ended challenge, Deadpool versus...?

Watercolour *Pencil*

IMPROVE YOUR WATERCOLOUR ART

OMAR RAYYAN pays special attention to colour, lighting and composition, and takes inspiration from past painters for his fun fantasy scene

For this workshop, I'll be painting a ferret with a flagon. The composition will have an outdoors setting with an early European feel. The challenges will be to render fur, armour, wet wood, ceramic, glass, and brick, all in a jolly outdoor pub setting!

My influences on this piece are 15th century Flemish tavern paintings and 19th century French master Jean-Louis-Ernest Meissonier and in particular, his painting The Card Players. I often look to the painters of the past for ideas.

I want to paint a happy chap, and because it'll be a single character image, have him addressing the viewer, to share in his happiness with his frothy beverage.

That settled, the look and anatomy of ferrets begin to dictate the design of the piece. Ferrets are long bodied and stubby

ARTIST INSIGHT

LOST AND FOUND
Watercolour on a well-sized paper has the flexibility of being able to remove or push around pigment. Lay down a wet line and you can dab it out or scrub it back and forth, trying various line positions and ideas, picking the strongest and pushing back the wrong answers. But beware: too much reworking on wet paper will munch up the surface and may give unwanted textures.

nosed, with short arms and legs, so it'll be fun to break up the slinky body with armour and clothing that at the same time show off his long, wiggly body.

The challenge will be to evoke a traditional drinking portrait, but with fun and whimsy. The attitude of the drinker is crucial, so initially I don't put much consideration into the colour palette, because warm, earth tones should work well. However, as you'll see, simple earth tones can quickly become a dance of balancing warms and colds, yellows and reds, against blues and cool browns.

The light is an outdoor, al fresco atmosphere, made possible by the gloom of the shadows. The light quality will be dictated by textures, metal, wood, cloth and so on. By exploring these qualities I'll inadvertently be painting the sunnier side, as shadow describes light.

I also consider how the feret sits in the scene. A tall, thin, wiggly figure will need some kind of support, aside from the table. Early on in the painting process, the building architecture with a window comes in as suitably strong geometry against which to play the animal's drunken movement, while the barrel acts as a weight and wedge to hold the lower half of the subject in place.

The fun of entering a 'simple' single subject is a great opportunity to focus on the complex power every seemingly simple element exerts on the whole.

Omar is a painter based in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. He paints fantasy and fairytale images – mainly in water colour, and often with animal characters behaving like people. www.studiorayyan.com

MATERIALS

PENCILS
- No harder than HB. 2B is great, but 6B can be too soft and dark, and can result in muddy colours

PAPER
- 140lb Fabriano Artistico Hot Press

BRUSHES
- Winsor & Newton Series 7 Kolinsky Sable size 1, and 10mm one stroke

PAINTS
- Sennelier:
Yellow light
Yellow ochre
Burnt sienna
Burnt umber
Warm sepia
Hooker's green
Phthalo blue
Indigo
- Winsor & Newton:
Scarlet lake
Prussian blue
- Holbein:
Rose madder
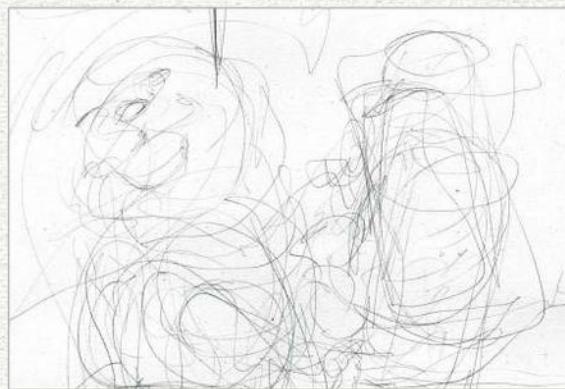
1 The sketch

I tend not to do thumbnails, but go after the initial feel and flavour that come to mind. This usually expresses itself as a simple gesture that I quickly and lightly scratch in pencil. In this case, because I don't have a strong picture in my head, I lay down lines that suggest several possibilities.

2 Draw with a brush

Next, after staring into the scribble with the initial sense of the image in mind, I decide to draw my ferret in watercolour using warm, light ochers. This is not the same as painting, mind!


3 Compose as I go

I turn the ferret's head to the left, bouncing off the flagon on the right, where it becomes the anchor. I follow the flow to the ground, where I find the need to draw a dirk (sword) set at 45 degrees, to both counterbalance the swoop of the torso and mirror the angle of the head.

BRUSH TIP

BRUSH LIFE
Quality brushes mean better art. And they won't lose their sharpness or strength, so can also be used as scrubbers and mops.

4 A second colour

Once I'm sure that the line work captures the essential elements I'm after, I redraw into areas that I'm happy with, using darker and cooler earth tones

5 *Blue is the colour*

It's now time to explore the volume of the subject, by defining the structure with a blue, cold counterweight. Note that just because parts are in shadow, it doesn't make them 'heavy' compositional elements. This stage could be seen as feeling out the edges of my mid-tones.

6 Bringing in paint techniques
As I move forward, the drawing starts to utilise painting techniques inherent in the brush. Textural considerations call for more expressive brush handling: dry brush scrapping for brick; splotch and scumble for stone; and float wet on wet for metal.

7 Defining the colour palette
Once I have warm lines and cool shadows, I decide on colours within the scene. With the cool armour set against a warm brick wall, I opt for a red cap. The ferret is already in warm earth tones, so this red can be easily shifted later on to either very warm or low key cool.
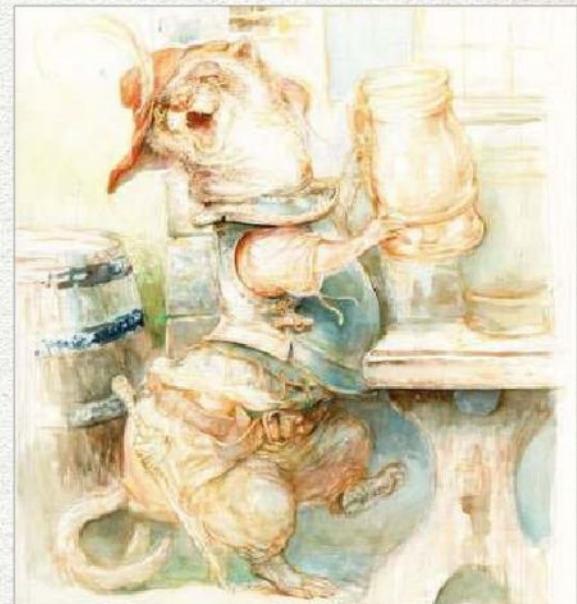
8 Start building weight
Now that all the elements are in place, it's time to build up weight and balance. I look for where the darker, heavier notes will be and start laying in washes and rendering out to the final image. In this case, it's the lower third of the painting, in particular the barrel and under the table.

9 Composing with tones
The balance in the scene comes from between the head and the flagon, but also the swoop of the body, especially the armoured belly off-setting the rump that's holding up the head, capped with the cap. But to keep it from becoming too heavy on the left, I need the flagon to carry the whole right of the composition, so the weight of the shutter becomes important. The flagon is stacked on the belly, pushed up by the legs and then lifted up by the shutters.

10 Final colour decision
As the piece gains weight and colour, the trousers call out to be red, because of the blue/green shutter, warm brown flagon, down to blue/cool armour, next to the cool colours under the table. So the pantaloons need to be a warm colour. See how things are cool, warm, cool, warm?

11 Red? Time to introduce green!

With the red bottom comes the contrast with green. The wet on wet floating of greens and yellows are wedged into the barrel shadow behind the red. This intersection of colour and shapes is very important because it serves as the foundation for the ferret's facial gesture.

12 Polish the painting

Using a dry brush, I weave colour and texture over and into the lower washes and the drawing. At this point, using pure pigment enables colour mixing to happen optically on the paper.

BRUSH TIP

NOT JUST FOR OIL
Use an old hog hair brush for any deep scrubbing out, to either burn out or kick back a value, or soften a texture.

13 Balance with washes

I counter the built-up weight of the drybrushing with glazing light washes of cool/warm tones to the background supports. This has the effect of knocking out pure whites so that selective whites on the main figure pop.

14 Low-tech Photoshop

Here's a tip if you have any doubts about your values. If you go dark with watercolour, it's hard to go back to light, so I shade in with pencil to see the effect. Just like in Photoshop, this enables me to shift the values back and forth until I'm sure on how to proceed. Then I erase the graphite and paint my tones to the desired value.

15 Rinse and repeat

As washes darken the piece, the underdrawing becomes softer. So I need to do a spot of redrawing, picking out the main anchor points of the ferret's gesture and anatomy. This also has the double effect of introducing a final layer of detail to the painting. ●
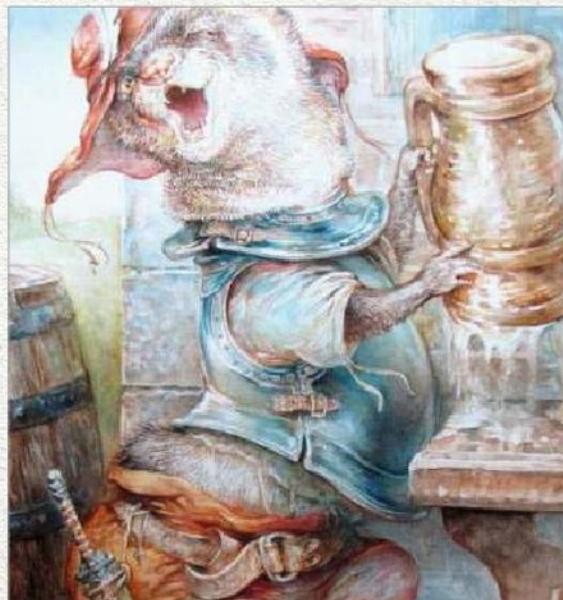
ARTIST INSIGHT

KNOW YOUR PAPER
Watercolour papers have a front and a back, referred to as their weave/felt print. That is to say, texture is different from one side to the other. In addition, the sizing of the paper is usually dominant on one side compared to the other, so be aware that using either the front or the back of the sheet can dramatically affect performance.

Pencil

DESIGN AND DRAW A FANTASTICAL BEAST

Fantasy creature design is essentially breaking down real animal forms and combining them to make something new, as BRYNN METHENEY explains

Creature design is built on the foundation of understanding real-life animals. Even when we design fantastical creatures like dragons or demons, pulling from nature can help make it more believable.

First, I explore the animals themselves. Drawing each species helps me get to know their anatomy. I take note of certain traits, proportions, markings and shapes as I draw. Then I find a shape inspired by one of the animals, which acts as a foundation for where I'd like to go. I use a harder pencil lead to keep things light and workable. I'm only concerned with getting down big shapes, like the shape of the head and general body and tail.

Studying how certain animals carry themselves will help you pose your creature. I'm looking to the tapir and spiny tailed lizard. I find a stance between these two animals and tweak it to make sure it looks natural. I sketch out the rest of the animal to find the landmarks, such as the shoulders, knees and the rib cage, using boxes and planar shapes to help flesh out the creature.

Now I add detail and other shapes, looking at the secretary bird. Claws, spikes, scales, fur and feathers help to flesh out its silhouette. It's important to make it iconic. Having too much detail or "stuff" happening on your creature could dilute the effectiveness of your design.

Brynn specialises in creature design, fantasy illustration and visual development. www.brynnart.com
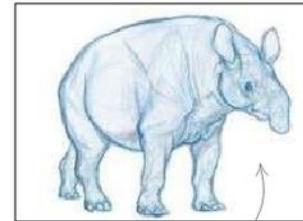
A spiny tailed lizard, a secretary bird and a tapir form the basis of my creature

I lie in bone landmarks, and get out my anatomy books, for cross-referencing when necessary.

I begin with the Col-Erase pencil by blocking in the general structure of the creature, working from light to dark.

Remember to keep it light! We want to build on top of this drawing as we go.
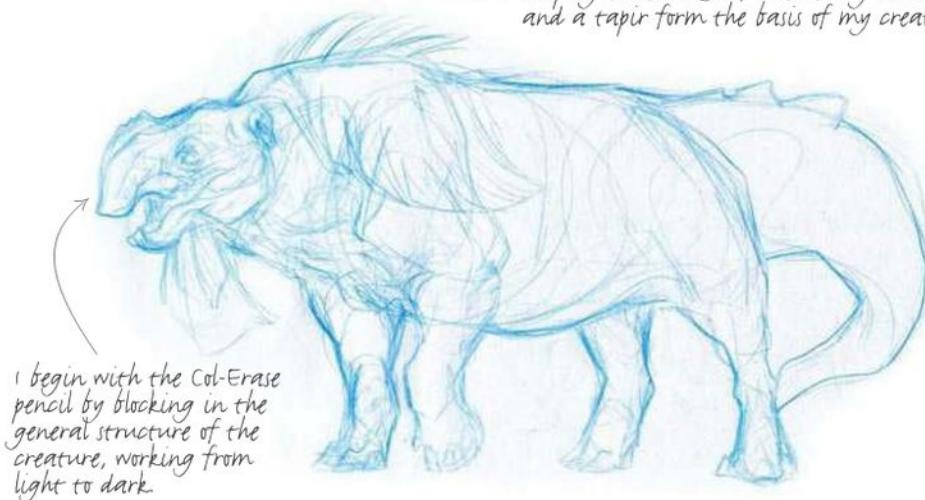
1 Find the general shape
As usual, I start light, and keep in mind the characteristics I want to combine. I'm always asking myself questions. What does this creature eat? How big is this creature? What is its general attitude? Is it male or female? Addressing these areas can help direct your design.

2 Build up forms
Next, I begin to lie in big forms. I want to find the anatomy of this creature. Because my beast has a skeleton, I'm careful to take note of where certain bones and landmarks are. I indicate key elements like the shoulder blades, the pelvis and the rib cage. These large forms will help me indicate where the muscles lie and help build a more believable creature.

Remember that vertebrate anatomy is similar between species. You can think of your own body as a reference point.
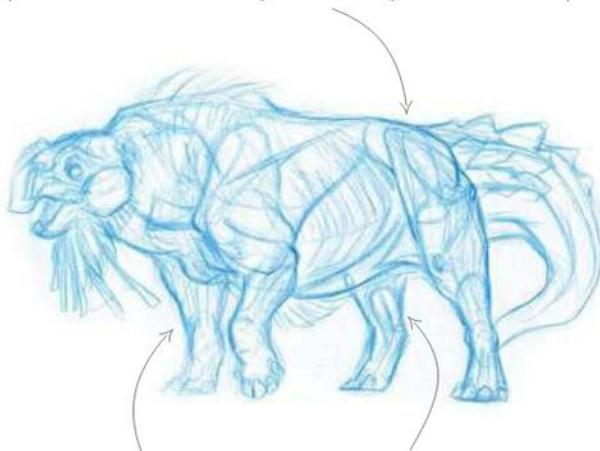
Keep the shapes big and light at this point. Think about where the muscles would attach to the bone.

When I draw in a new body feature, I'm careful to start with a lighter touch. As I build up my creature, I push down harder on my lead.
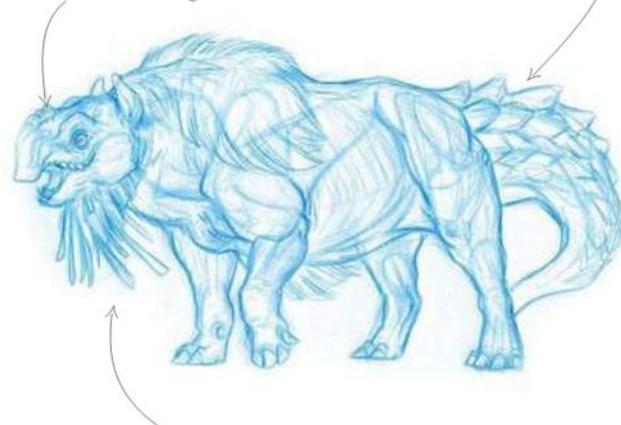
It's good to add and take away. Now is the time to experiment with shapes and features.

3 Nail the muscles

From here, I begin to define muscle groups, being sure to understand where certain muscles are connecting. This is vital and is informed by producing lots of animal drawing. It's important to know where muscles lie on your creatures for animation and modelling. Being able to show and tell where and how your creature moves is crucial when creating a grounded creature design.

4 Look at those details

Next, I begin to define certain details and shapes, always being careful to look at my reference. Here I'll begin to look at the tapir for the bulk of the body and the feet. The spiny tailed lizard helps with the tail, head and texture of the creature. I also look to the secretary bird for ideas about feather placement, eye placement and eventually colour.

Note things like battle damage, markings and folds of the skin. All of these factors can help sell the design.

COL-ERASE
WAXY LEAD
Take advantage of the Col-Erase pencil. Because it's waxy, it takes a while to solidify forms, and this lends itself to exploration.

ARTIST INSIGHT
RUBBER ERASERS
These are slightly more effective than a kneaded eraser and will do a better job of removing the Col-Erase lines that you put down. You can cut them with a sharp knife to create a nice corner for precision erasing.

5 Now, really look at those details!

As you draw those tapirs, you notice that each toe has a different shape and that the front legs have more toes. You'll notice the shape of the secretary bird's eyelids and the way the skim folds on the face. These small details can really push your creature design into the realm of believability.

Here, I switch to my graphite pencil and draw over my blue lines. This enables me to indicate the details and forms I want to show.

First Impressions

Paolo Rivera

A strong family art connection helped develop this comic artist's natural skills

Where did you grow up, and when did you realise you had a talent for painting?
I grew up in Daytona Beach, FL, surrounded by mullets, NASCAR, motorcycles, Catholic school, rock and rap. My parents opened an art supply store when I was a year old, and I started drawing at two (so they tell me). I used mostly pencils and markers – not a whole lot of painting until much later.

Did your upbringing influence your style of painting?
I didn't try to paint seriously until high school. I became obsessed with Alex Ross's art, who probably had the biggest influence on me, stylistically. But I was in love with comics and cartoons as well, so it was a pretty broad spectrum. My mom did framing and sold posters at the store, so I was surrounded by more classical influences as well. With her degree in textiles, she made sure I had some understanding of colour theory and design (and ample Halloween costumes). My dad, who currently inks my work, would probably have liked to be a fine artist, but airbrushed to pay the bills.

Did you naturally gravitate towards the comics industry?
There was never really any other option for me. We were about an hour away from Disney World, so people would always ask if I would work for them when I grew up. Although I had no intention, fate had other plans for me. My dad scared me away from animation (tons of work, not enough glory) but didn't scare me enough to keep me away from pencilling (tons of work, glory to match).

How has the field of comics changed since your time in the industry?
I consider myself very lucky when it comes to timing. I had the benefit of the internet to get me a job, but the field wasn't so crowded, especially when it
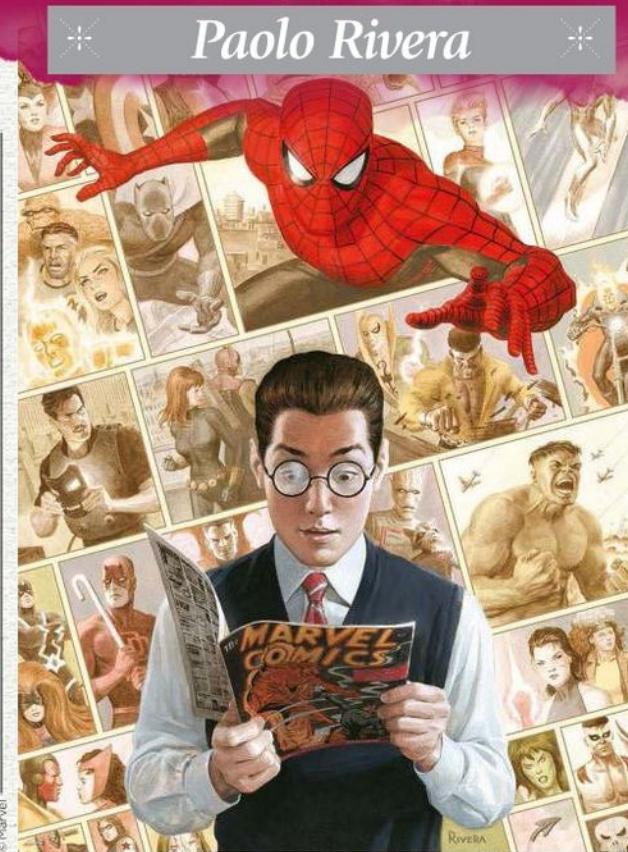
© Marvel

MARVEL 75TH ANNIVERSARY
"Tom Brevoort, who was my first Marvel editor, gave me the idea for this one."

came to comic book painters. Nowadays, it's never been easier to get your work out there – and because of that, the competition has never been higher. I started at Marvel a year before I graduated from art school. I'd like to think I could still break in now on my own merit, but I think it would've taken much, much longer. But aside from some

> ❝ I had the benefit of the internet to get me a job, but the field wasn't so crowded ❞
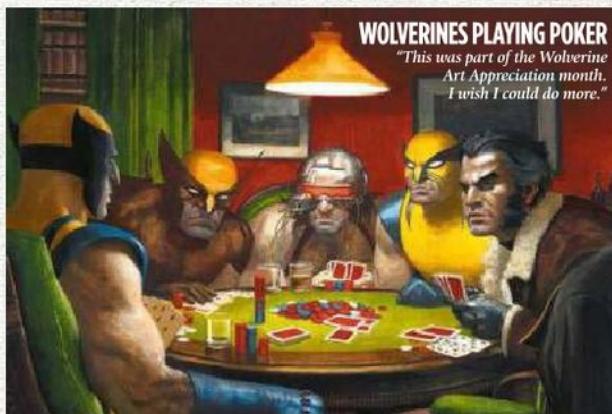
WOLVERINES PLAYING POKER
"This was part of the Wolverine Art Appreciation month. I wish I could do more."

very surface-level technological advances, the fundamentals haven't changed. The best part is uploading art instead of mailing it. I can resend a corrupted file, but there's one Doctor Doom painting that I'll never get back.

What's been the highlight of your career so far? Any low points?
It's pretty tough to beat the whole experience of being on Daredevil. The whole team was amazing, I got to work with my dad, and we all got a ton of recognition for just doing our job. I've had great experiences since then, but that was a perfect storm (the good kind). No low points… yet!

What's been your most challenging commission or assignment?
I'd have to say my first issue of Spider-Man (Spectacular #14 with Paul Jenkins). I've done more technically demanding work since, but at the time, that was the hardest I'd ever worked for an extended period of time. I can count on one hand the number of times I went outside during that three-and-a-half month period. I stopped shaving, stopped showering and survived on Oreo cookies. I also got fat. "A bit roly poly," as my editor later told me.

How regularly do you produce your sculptures?
Not enough! The last real sculpt I did was my wedding cake topper back in 2013. Prior to that, I did a Mary Jane maquette in 2010. Now I seem to only do digital maquettes, and they're never very detailed – just enough to get the proportions right as a drawing reference.

What advice would you give to your younger self?
"Just wait. You'll find the girl of your dreams. Here's her address." Actually, maybe that's a bad idea. Professionally speaking, I'd tell myself to concentrate on drawing rather than painting… but I probably wouldn't listen.

How would you sum up your work, in under 10 words?
I'd like to think the best is yet to come.

Paolo spent over 10 years at Marvel, before leaving to become an independent comic artist. He's won Eisner and Harvey awards for his work. www.paolorivera.com

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